

SPACE STORIES

FEATURING
THE GEARS OF TIME
a novel
by **WILLIAM MORRISON**

APRIL 25c

SPACE STORIES

APRIL 1953



A THRILLING
PUBLICATION



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POLIDENT



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SPACE STORIES

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VOL. 2, NO. 1

APRIL, 1953

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- THE GEARS OF TIME** William Morrison 10
He was trapped between those who moved too swiftly and those who moved too slowly, but time stood still for him when he met Medlona. She was old enough to be his grandmother's grandmother—but he loved her!

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Cover Painting by WALTER POPP

N. L. PINES, Publisher

FANNY ELLSWORTH, Managing Editor

EDWARD R. ROFHEART, Art Director

SAMUEL MINES, Editor

SPACE STORIES is published bi-monthly and copyright 1953 by Standard Magazines, Inc., 1125 E. Vaile Ave., Kokomo, Ind. Editorial and executive offices, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. Subscription: 112 issues, \$3.00, single copies, \$25; foreign postage extra. Entry as second class matter pending at the post office at Kokomo, Ind. Material is submitted at risk of the sender and must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes. All characters in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used it is a coincidence. April, 1953. Printed in the U.S.A.

NAMES IN SCIENCE

A Quiz by JOSEPH C. STACEY

LISTED below, with their first and last names scrambled, are 12 noted men and women of science. See if you can unscramble at least 8 of them correctly for a passing score. 9-10 is good, 11-12 excellent.

- | | |
|---|-----------------|
| 1. FERMI
<i>(physicist who helped smash the atom)</i> | (a) Galileo |
| 2. WRIGHT
<i>(he and brother Orville invented the airplane)</i> | (b) Guglielmo |
| 3. MEITNER
<i>(physicist who helped smash the atom)</i> | (c) Sir William |
| 4. PICCARD
<i>(aero engineer)</i> | (d) Enrico |
| 5. CURIE
<i>(she and spouse Pierre discovered radium)</i> | (e) Etienne |
| 6. CROOKES
<i>(discovered the cathode ray)</i> | (f) Sir Isaac |
| 7. EDISON
<i>(inventor—electrical standard)</i> | (g) Wilbur |
| 8. ROENTGEN
<i>(discovered the X-rays)</i> | (h) Marie |
| 9. MARCONI
<i>(wireless inventor)</i> | (i) Lise |
| 10. NEWTON
<i>(discovered the Law of Gravity)</i> | (j) Thomas |
| 11. GALILEI
<i>(famed astronomer)</i> | (k) Jean |
| 12. MONTGOLFIER
<i>(he and brother Joe invented the hot-air balloon)</i> | (l) Wilhelm |



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SPACE STATION



A Department of Letters and Comment

ANY stranger wandering into these columns for the first time isn't likely to feel lost to any noticeable degree. The same jokes, insults and compliments fly thick and fast as they do in SS, TWS and FSM—the only difference being that in self-defense we intend to keep this one short and crisp. So here is:

GREAT GODS OF SPACE

by Dick Clarkson

Dear Sam: I saved up the first ish of SPACE to compare with the second, just out. And I have found some things which I hadn't expected. Which is why I'm at this typer instead of studying.

First, I wasn't surprised at all that you continued to have the best long stuff on the market. I've always said so, and this new one of yours is no different. Which brings me to a question which I wonder how many fans have asked themselves: why do I like space opera? Answer: I can't explain it. Space opera was, of course, what began s-f. It shows things which you like to read about—fast action (which, while corny at times, still packs a wallop after twenty-five years), new inventions, unheard-of gimmicks . . . well, damn near everything. All I can say is that I have to quote Madeline Hendrix and, "... you have my quarters mortgaged for life."

Like I was saying, the novels and novellas compared more than favorably with each other . . . same high quality. But the shorts have me confounded. The first ishs were really good, and I had hopes they would continue, but they got back to normal (which is not so hot) in this here. I always like to compare the first issues of a new mag to see if the first is just a flash in the proverbial pan. As far as I'm concerned, your longer stories make it worth the quarter, even if I do have to suffer through the shorts. What annoys me is that I have just about time to read your shorts, but I have to take the longer ones in installments. Oh, well . . . you can't have everything.

Maybe it's space opera, but I really got a bang out of PLANET OF THE DAMNED. Of course, Vance is good whether he's writing s-f in

long ones or short, but this one I stayed up till some ungodly hour reading last week. Crossen right back into the Manning Draco-type swing of things. And in your first ish, the Bryce Walton opus took the bacon—really great! I'm a lowbrow in all my tastes, and maybe that's why space opera still attracts me, but I can't help but exult even to the point of not trying to make lousy jokes.

When are you going to trim the edges? There are rumors about January or February . . . will that hold for all your mags, or just for one or two? With trimmed edges, you will have everything but good short stories. That should be able to be remedied. I've said it so many times already I sound like a parrot, but I still pick up and read your mags before any, and I mean any, of the other ones on the market. All you have done with SPACE has been to give me yet more frustration, trying to find time to read another. SPACE is great, Sam. I don't think I have to tell you to keep it up—you will!—Harvard U., Lionel B-12, Cambridge 38, Mass.

That's what we like: honest criticism, no matter how frank, not flowery compliments. Don't just say SPACE STORIES is great—tell us why it's great. All right, put down the typewriter—it's a joke!

Trimmed edges so far only on SS. Won't promise you anything else until we know more about it than we do now. So you're a lowbrow, huh? What are you doing at Harvard? They studying you?

AND OPERAS OF SPACE

by Joe Keogh

Sam: I have just perused the second issue of your new mag, SPACE STORIES; I congratulate you on this new arrival to your trio—this makes it quadruplet, uh? I see there's no radical change anyway (you might just as well have put TWS out monthly). Anyway, Sam, please don't make the mistake of keeping all the good stuff in SS, TWS, or FSM! This would be despicable! (enough of this raging).

(Continued on page 130)



THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

You Can Influence Others With Your Thinking!

TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a positive demonstration that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

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SPS-4

SCIENCE BULLETINS

A Page of Facts and Oddities



COMING DOWN WITH A COLD? It doesn't always mean that you've been too near someone who has a cold, or that you've been in a draft. Cold bugs are always with us. Your succumbing to them is a matter of your susceptibility at any given time. Resistance can be lowered by any number of factors, of which chilling is only one. Emotional stress will do it—over-eating will do it. Keeping your resistance high is a matter of general health and emotional balance.

• • • • •

THE RECENTLY PUBLICIZED CASE of boy turns into girl has made many people wonder how sex reversals are made possible. Actually they are not. A genuine male cannot be changed into a genuine female. In cases of abnormal development where characteristics of both sexes are present, surgery and hormones may be used to suppress one sex and stimulate the other. But even in these cases the conversion may not be complete. For example, a man changed into a woman might marry, but might not be able to bear children.

• • • • •

PUT AWAY THOSE BATHROOM SCALES, the universe is heavier than you think. It is also heavier than the scientists thought. How you go about weighing a universe is not clear, but what the astronomers say, as reported by Dr. Thornton Page of Johns Hopkins, is that it is much denser than supposed. Hence it is estimated to be ten times as heavy as previously believed. Now when you look in the mirror, does that make you feel better?

• • • • •

THE MOST PREVALENT TYPE OF HUMAN ILLNESS is not colds as you may have thought, but dental caries. In fact, if our consumption of carbohydrates continues to climb, future generations are going to be decidedly toothless, warns the American Dental Association!

• • • • •

ATOMIC PARTICLES called Mesons are one of the fundamental bits of matter and it is now thought that Mesons are born in the collisions of electrical energies which are of a comparatively low order of strength. This research gives rise to the hope that Mesons can be created in the laboratory, bringing us just one step closer to the riddle of the universe.

• • • • •

THINK YOU HAVE ALLERGIES? The American Veterinary Medical Association reports that animals have more allergies than human-type peoples. Dogs get everything under the sun from hay fever to hives and eczema, horses and cows seem to get hay fever, which is rough on a vegetarian. And, of course, it is well known that cats are allergic to dogs. So the next time Rover bites the mailman, be gentle with him, he may be allergic to blue.

• • • • •

BETTER MOVE THAT BEACH COTTAGE BACK, the ocean's level has risen five inches in the past sixty years. The cause is melting polar ice. There is nothing regular about it, however. Warm and cold cycles are not regular enough to make prediction possible on any reliable scale. Present harbor facilities can accommodate a rise of 24 inches, after that it's take to the hills.

He was caught between those who moved too swiftly and those who moved too slowly, but time stood still when he met Mediana



The GEARS of TIME

A Novel by WILLIAM MORRISON

I

YOU might have thought that as a man from Mars it would be natural for him to find Earth strange and incomprehensible. Only it wasn't natural at all. They were of the same race, and had essentially the same customs and the same way of life. Mars had been colonized by men from Earth, and there was still no



She Was Old Enough to Be His Grandmother's

difference in appearance between the men from the two planets. But there seemed to be a tremendous difference in psychology. He didn't understand what it was, but already he had encountered hidden strains, had felt a tension that made Earth baffling and a bit uncomfortable.

The girl in the spaceport, for instance, with her slow, incredible grace—

He caught himself. He wasn't on Earth to think about girls. He was an ordinary citizen of Mars, here to carry out duties more responsible than most citizens had. He would keep his mind on them.

In the room that had been reserved for him, he found himself alone and tired, worn out by the unexpected accidents and delay of the space trip. His first impulse was to drop into one of the easy chairs and relax. He had caught a glimpse of the city from the helicopter, but he wanted a closer view.

The communications devices were identical with those on Mars. Buttons, microphones, speakers, screens, all were in the same place with respect to each other. He touched a button on the wall, asked for the Commerce Department, and a moment later was speaking to a girl who informed him that she was Hjalmar's secretary.

"Yes, Mr. Correll, we've been expecting you. Will you let yourself be seen, please?"

He pressed the visor button, and the scanning eyes picked him up. "All right?" he asked.

"Quite all right, Mr. Correll. Your appearance checks with the physio-pattern we have. Mr. Hjalmar is busy right now, but I'm authorized to make an appointment for seven-thirty. Mr. Hjalmar had asked me to invite you to dinner, so you'll be able to talk things over at leisure. Is that satisfactory?"

"That'll do."

He saw her note the appointment on

the calendar pad. "Monday, 15th," was the date. He should have arrived a week earlier. Lucky I got here in 2731, he thought to himself. If we hadn't been lucky enough to be rescued—

"We'll have one of our chauffeurs pick you up. Thank you very much, Mr. Correll."

He was going to say that he didn't want any one to pick him up, that he'd get there himself, but the line clicked, and her own image disappeared. It didn't matter, he told himself. He'd do as he pleased anyway.

NOW he gave way to that first impulse and dropped into the chair. Lying back in it and looking through the wall, he could see most of the city. There were other buildings as tall as the hotel, but not many, and they were scattered in such a way that they cut off little of his view. He had an impression of broad streets, of parks and buildings neatly planned and stretching off into the distance. The city sprawled for miles in every direction, but it was no longer the congested human rookery of old. Even the rooftops around the helicopter landings were covered with strips of grass and flowers.

Off to his right was a large building that puzzled him at first. He found it familiar, although at the same time he was sure that he had never seen anything exactly like it. Then, quite suddenly, he understood. It was a department store, in general design like those he had seen on Mars, but larger, more impressive.

He was curious about the ways of Earth. He had worked too hard all his life to spare the time for a vacation trip, and he was sure that it was full of things new to him. From the day his father died, in fact, a vacation had been out of the question.

Perhaps it had been his own fault. He could have left the support of his un-

Grandmother, but He Loved Her Just the Same

fortunate mother to relatives, or if these had refused, to the Social Security Department. But as became a Martian he had a sense of pride in his abilities and a sense of duty that would not permit him to shift a burden which he felt was properly his own. He went to work at once, carrying on his studies in industrial science at the same time.

It hadn't been easy. It had meant a sixteen-hour working day and had left him little time for fun, but he hadn't minded. At least he hadn't minded at first. And then he had obtained his college degree and been hired by the Com-



merce Department of Mars, and for the first time it seemed that the pressure might slacken, and that he'd have a chance to enjoy life.

But it hadn't turned out that way. The Commerce Department's work was of prime importance, and Correll's sense of duty, like the rest of him, operated overtime. The sixteen-hour day at times expanded to as much as eighteen.

He accepted the assignment to Earth with a feeling of guilt. How much time he'd have to waste! First there'd be the trip both ways, and then on Earth itself there'd be days in which he'd have nothing to do but kill time and wait for appointments. He was aware, of course, that new scenes and new experiences might broaden his horizon and do him good. Mars was still only a pale copy of its mother planet, and you were only a provincial until you had paid at least one visit to Earth. But after having

worked so hard and so steadily, forced idleness seemed like a crime.

Well, crime or not, he was committed to it.

HE CLOSED the door of the room behind him, walked to the elevator, and let it take him to the ground. There was a moving roadway he could have taken, but he avoided that. After so many days in the confinement of the ship he liked to walk.

The very act of breathing Earth air was exhilarating. It didn't have that vaguely constricting effect that the carefully conditioned air aboard ship had had, and it was considerably richer than the air on Mars. The synthetic Martian air was still only a few hundred years old. The original atmosphere had been too thin for human beings. Not until the widespread cultivation of ferriphilic plants which utilized the red rust of the Martian soil as a source of oxygen, did the quality of the atmosphere begin to improve and make unnecessary the use of spacesuits and hermetically sealed domes where people breathe comfortably. Gradually both the carbon dioxide content and the oxygen content of the atmosphere rose. But the pressure was still below that of Earth's atmosphere, and there was a lack of nitrogen and inert gases.

Thus, to the Martians like Correll, Earth's atmosphere was stimulating. He enjoyed his short walk to the full.

He found to his astonishment that the department store he had entered held few surprises for him. Fashions for women, so far as he could tell, were much the same as they were on Mars. They seemed to him of lighter fabric, and skimpier in cut, as befitted the warmer climates of Earth, but that was all. Fashions for men, and here he was on surer ground, were also little different. A few items—the apparatus for tropical sports, for instance—was new

to him, but in general, life on the two planets was much the same, the one great difference being that Earth's higher temperature and richer atmosphere made for a more rounded development. Earth seemed to have more of everything, and in slightly greater variety.

The store was crowded, and it might have been the interior of a similar store on Mars, except that here, too, he was conscious of a certain tension he hadn't expected. Was it the way people walked and moved when they were crowded and always in a hurry, the abruptness with which they picked up an article to examine it, and then put it down again? It was that, he thought, and more. There was something that went beyond the trivial symptoms he could see.

There had been that girl in the spaceport, he remembered. Unexpectedly something happened that made no sense. And the rest of the shoppers, Earth men and women all, seemed to be as much startled and angered by it as he was.

It was simply that a man began to run. Until he did so, Correll hadn't noticed him in the press of people. But it struck him that the man must have behaved quite soberly and decently not to have drawn attention to himself. Now he was behaving like a maniac. In what seemed like a violent frenzy, he shoved people out of his way and raced through the thickest part of the crowd, tossing his victims aside like so many inanimate dolls. He moved so rapidly that it was impossible to stop him. In a few seconds he had passed the escalators and made for the window. There was a gasp of horror from the crowd as he dived out into the open air.

CORRELL saw the flying hands shoot out at a plastic rope. A few seconds later, when he himself reached a nearby window and looked out, he saw the man far below, safely on the ground. He had slid down to the roof of a neighboring building, leaped to a ledge on the fifteenth floor, and from that to another

ledge on the tenth. Apparently a jump of five stories at a time meant nothing to him. Now he was running around the corner.

Correll turned back. Somebody was asking, "What happened? Was he crazy? Did he steal anything?"

"Nothing's gone from the shelves."

"Maybe he picked somebody's pocket," suggested a voice.

"Nobody complained. It just doesn't make sense."

"My sister says that just last week she saw something like that happen in her office." The speaker had a group of women around her. "Sometimes I think that civilization's getting to be too much for us. We'll all go mad eventually."

Correll shook his head in wonder. Despite the irrationality of the man's behavior, the glimpse he had caught of his face was not that of a madman. It was more that of a man trying desperately to escape. From what?

There was no guessing. But if the man were mad, Correll could only wish he had the other's skill in leaping out of the window and getting to the ground. No sane man of his acquaintance would have tried it.

The more he thought of it, the more the man's agility aroused his envy. Correll was a little sensitive on the subject of speed. He himself, he knew, was regarded as slow. Nice guy, Correll, his fellow-students had thought, good sound thinker if you give him time to sort out his conclusions, but a little slow on the uptake. He was tall, husky, the perfect example of the slow-moving, slow-thinking plodder.

It was stupid and unfair, and he had always resented it. They hadn't appreciated how much his mind had been dulled and his reflexes slowed by that endless sixteen hour grind, day after day, with only the week ends in which to sleep late and overcome the exhaustion that always threatened him. He had been in no condition to move and think rapidly, in no mood for the rapid and presumably witty repartee in which the others

indulged. He had been a man who worked.

The habits he had acquired in those days had persisted in his six years of employment with the Commerce Department. The Department was a place where they appreciated industry. They liked a man with a sense of duty, and they promoted him as the opportunity warranted. But they had a bit of contempt for him too. Like the students, they regarded him as a dull plodder who was useful but far from brilliant. At twenty-eight some of them thought of him as an old man.

There were times when he was almost willing to accept their opinion. Almost, but not quite. Give him the chance—

He was near an escalator when a voice respectfully interrupted his thoughts. "Mr. Correll?"

The man wore a Commerce Department uniform. Correll said, "You haven't been sent to get me, have you?"

"Yes, sir, I have. Mr. Hjalmar finished with his conference early, and was very angry to find that your meeting with him had been postponed for several hours. He asked us to invite you over to have a drink or two with him before dinner."

"I'm not that important."

"I'm afraid you are, sir. He insisted that we mustn't let you get away. That's why, when we found that you had left the hotel, we looked here. Newcomers to Earth often go to the department store to learn how the other world lives."

"All right, I'm at your disposal. Where's your helicopter, on the roof?"

"That's right, Mr. Correll."

The chauffeur led the way, and a moment later he was in flight again. The sky was getting dark now, and the city lights flashed on in a pattern that was beautiful, even if meaningless to him. He could enjoy watching it in the thought that he was being taken care of by very competent and considerate hosts.

THE helicopter settled down, and he got out. As he looked around, he saw high opaque walls, and up above, a transparent roof. They hadn't landed on the roof at all, but had gone through the opened sky door, which was now closing over their heads. With sudden suspicion, Correll said, "This isn't the Commerce Department Building."

"No, Mr. Correll. However, you need have no fear. You will be released unharmed in a few moments. Meanwhile, someone would like to have a talk with you."

He felt himself flushing. What a fool he had been to come along so docilely! They were right about him, his wits were slow. He said, "I have nothing to say to anyone. I don't like your manner of arranging talks."

"Naturally not," agreed the chauffeur. "However, that isn't for me to say. Come this way, please."

The chauffeur led him into a room and said, "Make yourself comfortable, please, Mr. Correll. Someone will be with you in a moment."

He stepped out. Correll had a feeling of resentment, as well as of bewilderment. He was on a quite ordinary mission, he reminded himself, and nothing out of the ordinary had any right to happen to him. Obviously something was wrong in the Commerce Department. Could it have anything to do with the general air of tension he had already noted?

The door opened, and another man stepped in. He said, "Mr. Correll—"

"I don't know what you want to talk about, but I can assure you that I do not intend to carry on any meaningful conversation under such conditions."

"Perhaps you will change your mind, Mr. Correll. However, I'm not the man you're to speak to. Personally, I am unimportant. I am here simply, shall we say, to prepare the way."

"Why does the way need preparing?"

"Because my principal has little time to spare. What negotiating has to be

done he must do himself. And he is a very busy man."

"So am I. I am expected at the Commerce Department."

"Not for a while yet, Mr. Correll."

"You have spies there?"

"Beside the point, Mr. Correll. To begin with, I should like to point out that my principal has certain proposals to make. They are quite serious proposals, and I suggest you take them that way. He will require but a moment or two of your time, simply, as I have already indicated, because he cannot spare his own."

"I suppose I have no choice but to listen," frowned Correll.

"Quite right." The door opened again. "Here is Mr. Arwon."

The man who stood in the doorway was that strangely incongruous figure, a young prophet. No more than thirty, guessed Correll. He was of moderate height, stocky, with a brown beard that hid the lower part of his face. Above the bearded cheekbones Arwon's eyes seemed to glitter with a strange fire.

HE SPOKE with a curious slowness, as if he wanted to hurry, and something kept him back. "Mr. Correll, please listen. You come prepared to exchange certain Martian raw materials for Earth machinery. I wish—" he paused uncertainly and licked his lips. "I wish to make you an offer. You will arrange for more of this machinery than you need. You will sell the excess to me. I shall pay you in raw materials that will enable you to meet your commitments and permit Mars to make a profit in addition."

"That's absurd, Arwon," retorted Correll. "Do you expect me to make a deal behind my government's back? I wonder what sort of people you have on Earth who will do things like that. We don't have them on Mars."

"Please, no moral indignation. I have a list of our requirements."

"Why not submit it to the Earth government direct? If there's a profit in it

for Mars, there must be one for Earth too. They should be glad to make the exchange."

"There are reasons."

"Dishonest ones, I have no doubt. No, sir, I wouldn't touch a proposition like that with a ten-foot pole."

"I was afraid you would say that. However, perhaps you do not fully understand my offer. The profit to Mars would be enormous."

"You have a rich source of raw materials?"

"We can get all we need."

Correll stared at the other's glittering eyes. For a moment he had the impression that the man was drugged. Drugged and feverish. Yes, that would explain it. The man put his hand on a chair as if for support, and Correll casually let his own hand brush against the other's. To his surprise, the man's hand felt cool. Not icy, just cool.

He said, "I'm not really interested. However, I should like to see that list."

"Of course you would. And you shall—the moment you agree to our proposition."

He shook his head. "I've already told you I wouldn't agree."

The bearded man tottered and fell. The man who had come into the room before him caught him before he hit the floor. He said briefly, "The interview is over, Mr. Correll. You will be escorted back to a place where you can get transportation to the Commerce Department, in which, as you say, you are awaited."

Why the devil did he fall? Correll thought angrily. It wasn't the shock of refusal. That had taken place a moment or two before. Was that glitter in his eye a sign of drugging, or possibly, of the madness that seemed to be afflicting Earth?

The chauffeur had come into the room again, and led Correll out. They passed a door which was just closing. A robot was coming out and Correll caught a glimpse of a woman seated at a table, with other men and women in the background. He saw her face for only a

second before the robot closed the door. But he recognized it. It was a serene face, a face quiet in its beauty, though the peaceful expression was somewhat belied by the liveliness of the brown eyes. It was the same woman he had seen at the spaceport, now evidently waiting patiently for him to be gone before she and her friends came out of what seemed like hiding.

He was still puzzling over it as he was flown through the sky door and out toward the city again. When finally he was allowed to get out, he found himself in a part of the city that was, naturally enough, entirely unfamiliar to him.

"A cruising taxi-copter swooped low in response to his signal, and a few moments later he was at the Commerce Department. Hjalmar's name opened all doors. Evidently they were expecting him.

He faced a short brisk official with a smart little mustache and a brow made higher by the unplanned withdrawal of the hairline. "Mr. Hjalmar?"

"No. But you say you are Mr. Correll?"

"I am. I have been delayed—"

"Not at all. You are under arrest, Mr. Correll," said the official cheerfully.

II

IT ISN'T easy to talk when you are stupefied with rage. He felt he was going to explode. The madness he had seen afflicting Earth had spread to the officials and was affecting him. His first outraged words seemed to trip over his lips, and must have been entirely incomprehensible to the guards who seized him by the arms and led him toward the door of the room.

There he made his stand, planting his feet firmly and shouting, "Look here, this is an outrage. I'm an accredited representative of the Mars government."

"Really?"

"Yes, and I had an authorized appointment with Mr. Hjalmar."

"Save your breath, Mr. Correll had an appointment with Mr. Hjalmar for 7:30. He kept his appointment. It is now 10:30. What are you trying to get away with, showing up at this hour, claiming you're Mr. Correll and insisting on seeing Mr. Hjalmar? I think we'd better keep you in, shall we say, 'protective custody' until we can have you examined by a competent psychiatrist."

Of everything the man said, two words struck Correll. He repeated, as if in a daze, "Ten thirty!"

The man gestured toward the wall. The clock read 10:31.

Correll stared uncomprehendingly. Where had the time gone. It was impossible—

He allowed himself to be lead out. A few moments later, as the cell door closed behind them, another strange thought came into his head. Only a short time before, he had been exhausted. Now he wasn't tired at all.

He might have been drugged, of course. But then there would have been a blank spot somewhere. But there was no gap that he couldn't bridge. He let his mind run back over all that he had done that afternoon, and everything followed in smooth and logical order, without a break. Where had he lost those precious hours? Those precious hours he had not felt go by.

For a moment he had the sense of being smashed in a sequence of malign events which had no relation to each other. Take that business on the spaceship, for instance; when without any previous warning whatever, the rear-rockets engineer, engaged in helping swing the ship wide around an unexpected swarm of meteors, had collapsed on the job, and almost the entire fuel load of rockets had been touched off. There had been a rapid series of shattering explosions that accelerated the ship almost past the endurance of its tough metal frame, caused two deaths, and distributed injuries major and min-

or among half the remaining passengers.

The ship had swung way off its orbit, and they had been fortunate indeed to contact a rescue vessel and be supplied with enough fuel to land on Earth, hungry and thirsty, but glad after their ordeal to feel firm planetary soil under their feet.

Investigation had uncovered no reason for the engineer's collapse. The man had passed a health examination before leaving Mars, and he had recovered sufficiently to be in good health by the time the ship landed on Earth. The ship's doctor had been baffled, but seemed not too greatly surprised.

Correll wondered if it were related to the mysterious cases of coma they'd been having on Mars during the past decade. They thought it came from rapid changes of gravity. That couldn't be it, though. Men had been undergoing gravity changes ever since the first spaceship left Earth, but this coma was something relatively new. And his mother—she was born on Mars, never left it in her life—she was a victim too. Been in a special sanitarium for eight years. And no hope of getting out. No, thought Correll, it's something else. Maybe something in the artificial Martian atmosphere, or the Martian soil—

He shook his head. He was back in the old rut of thoughts that always ended in self-deny, he told himself. He pulled himself back to his current problems—why the devil had he been put in this prison, and how was he going to get out?

Damn it, he was slow after all. He had been tricked, completely tricked. He ran to the door and began to yell for the guard.

The guard appeared, looking annoyed. "What is it?"

"I want to see Mr. Hjalmar."

"Mr. Hjalmar's busy. Will the World President do instead?" asked the guard insultingly.

"Anybody! Even a clerk in the Commerce Department. But whoever it is, send him quickly. This is important."

"There's no one in the Commerce Department now. There won't be any one until morning."

"All the more reason to hurry. I was supposed to discuss the list of goods we needed—"

"It'll keep till morning," said the guard, and left him.

The fool, thought Correll bitterly. It wouldn't keep at all. His kidnappers had sent their own men to take his place. The substitute had submitted the list *they* wanted filled. He had been so eager to get the materials he needed that he had probably been very generous in his terms. If the materials were surplus on Earth, they would probably be loading overnight, without waiting for formal ratification by the trade committee. By some time the next morning, in response to the plea that the shipments were urgently needed on Mars, the freighter would take off. What happened to it from then on would be up to its new owners, whoever they were.

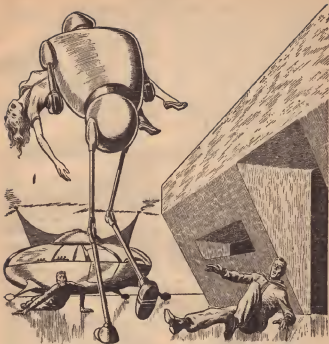
If he could only get out of here, escape for a few moments. . . .

And then he told himself he was being a fool. This was a prison from which no one could escape. The metal cell walls were smooth and unyielding, the entrance door fitted into the sides so perfectly that it seemed to be part of them. There was no lock to pick or break. And in the corridors outside, there were human guards as well as scanners that focused instantly on every moving object. Outside the prison building there was a well-scanned barrier zone where any man who attempted to escape would at once find himself under the fire of automatically aimed paralysis rifles.

He swore softly. He had been neatly tricked and rendered helpless. But the Commerce Department had been tricked even more neatly. When the truth came out, *they* would take the blame.

It was with that consoling thought that he finally went to sleep.

ONLY a few hours later he awoke. The cell block was ringing with



One of the robots was carrying the unconscious Medana

alarms, and his own door was open. As he ran out into the corridor, no one tried to stop him. Other prisoners came out of their own cells to join him, looking just as dazed as he must have. They seemed more frightened than anxious to escape. It took them almost a minute to realize that there were no guards in sight.

If they had meant to escape, that minute was their undoing. As they milled through the corridor and around the bend, a metal door dropped from the ceiling to bar their way. A loudspeaker blared, "Get back into your cells, everybody. You can't get away. Get back or you'll be shot down."

The other prisoners obeyed at once. Correll said loudly, "I'll get back if you want me to. But I know something about how the prisoner you want escaped."

He knew nothing, of course. He wasn't even sure that a prisoner had escaped. He had no idea how an escape could be managed from this perfectly guarded maze.

The loudspeaker seemed to stammer. Finally, after a full half-minute in which it made incomprehensible noises, it said, "All right, step forward and stand at the door. The rest of you get back to your cells!"

He could hear the whispers of excitement from the other prisoners as the

door lifted. On the other side, two guards with guns drawn stood waiting for him. They motioned him forward, and once more the iron door clanged behind him.

In the warden's office there were two men. One of them was the warden himself, elderly, plump, and more than a little worried. The other was the official who had arrested him, now tense and considerably upset. Correll took note of the unhappy expression on his face, and of the restless way in which he was drumming with his fingers on the top of the desk alongside which he stood.

The warden demanded, "What's your name? Your real name?"

"Correll. Alvo Correll."

"You still maintain that?" asked the official.

"Of course." Then he told it, beginning with what he had seen in the department store.

They listened, interrupting only when he seemed to have left something out. The official, for instance, didn't believe that he could have made the mistake he did about the time. The warden was more curious about what the man who had leaped through the window had been doing in the department store.

Correll came to the end of his story, and the two men stared at each other. "I hope I've been helpful," he said.

The warden shrugged. "I don't know. In the long run, what you have told us may prove important. As to what happened here, I'm not sure."

"The prisoner who escaped," said Correll. "What about him?"

"You were going to tell us about that."

"Either he was the man who sprang out of the window or one who could move like him."

"What makes you think that?"

"Otherwise he couldn't get out of a place like this. He was someone you caught accidentally and couldn't hold."

"Not a bad guess. However, we don't need guesses."

"And his rescuers were men of the same kind. That's why things happened

so quickly tonight. The rescue was practically over before you knew it had started."

"We don't need you to tell us that," said the warden stiffly.

"Well, I'm telling you something more. I'm telling you that the man who took my place was an impostor. I don't know exactly how he did it, but it's obvious that the girl who made my appointment for 7:30 must have been involved somehow. She knew what I looked like. Hjalmar didn't."

"He might have. His ignorance would have been too much for an impostor to count on."

"All right then, let's say that the man was made up to look like me. But in case of doubt he would have been fingerprinted and his physio-pattern checked. He must have removed the records of my fingerprints and my pattern and substituted his own."

"Very likely," conceded the official.

"It's obvious that someone inside the department has been working with my kidnappers."

"If you really are Correll, we'll have to check."

"I don't mind staying in a cell for a while," said Correll grimly. "But while I'm here, my kidnappers are getting away with a cargo of materials they consider vital. Of course I shouldn't dream of suggesting you put your neck out and try to stop them. No good bureaucrat would do that. But you might at least try to find out what they've ordered that's so important."

"I might." The man bent over the desk and spoke into a phone extension. After a moment he sat up and looked at Correll. There was a look of bewilderment on his face, as if things were happening too fast. "Machine tools," he said. "And a new type of electronic valve."

"Now if you could hold up the ship's departure for a few hours—"

"That won't be necessary. The ship's departure is already being held up indefinitely—pending investigation."

The tone of the man's voice struck Correll. He said, "You mean the Commerce Department already suspects that something is wrong?"

"With good reason," replied the other grimly. "A group of men attacked the freighter and got away with the entire cargo about half an hour ago. That happened at the same time the rescue of that prisoner was being staged here. The methods were similar, too. I suppose, you are who you say you are after all. My apologies. If you and your Government put in a claim for damages, I shall see that it is paid."

A BELL tinkled softly. The warden, in his turn, reached for the phone, while Correll waited impatiently. The warden said, "Well, strictly speaking, no. This is a prison, not a warehouse. But we *do* take, er, visitors into protective custody. Yes, I suppose it could be done. Send it over."

"What's 'it'?"

The warden said slowly, "This grows stranger all the time. Did you say you saw a robot at this place?"

"That puts it pretty well."

"I've been asked to take care of a robot prisoner. Actually, of course, there's no problem. We'll just disconnect the guiding center and then examine the psuedo-brain records to find out what the thing's been doing."

"You won't get far that way," said the official. "If it's been involved in anything wrong, most of the brain records will have been erased."

"Naturally. Still, we may get an interesting clue or two."

"Where was the robot taken?"

"A short distance from the ship that was attacked. There were no robots involved in the original robbery. It must have been part of the group that tried to hijack the thieves themselves."

"Did the original thieves escape?"

"Completely, along with most of what they stole. We managed to recover a crate or two of electronic valves."

The official stood up. "This may be

our chance to learn something at last. I'm anxious to see what we'll find out by examining that robot. I have an idea that we may get some interesting information about the people who held Correll."

"They're bringing it right up," said the warden. "I'll notify my mechanical brain experts."

It was at that moment the sound of an explosion came from below. The three men looked up and then stared at each other. "What now?" asked Correll. "Another escape?"

The warden shrugged, and spoke into the phone. He smiled wryly. "The robot," he turned to address Correll, "has just committed suicide! There go our brain records."

III

AT TEN in the morning, Hjalmar's own eyes seemed dull as he greeted Correll. He said, "More apologies, Mr. Correll, this time from me. We haven't been very hospitable here on Earth."

"At any rate, you've been interesting," said Correll pleasantly, examining the man who faced him. There had been a time when a man's name gave some idea of his nationality, of the kind of man he was. That time was no more. He noted that Hjalmar was a burly giant who seemed almost seven feet tall and not much less than that broad. From the number of fine lines in his face he seemed middle-aged, seventy, at least. His hair, however, was thick and jet black, with not a trace of gray.

He noted that Hjalmar's eyes were blue, as had once befitted a man of his name, but his complexion was dark. The old combinations of hair, eye and skin color had gone for good, thought Correll. There were no longer Norwegians, Europeans, or Asiatics, but Earthman only. Or rather, human beings, for the Martians were hardly a race apart.

Hjalmar was studying him with the same intensity. "You've certainly been an interesting guest," he said. "You

look very much like your previous self, Mr. Correll. So much like him, in fact, that I'm thinking of withdrawing my apology for confusing the two of you. And in view of the fact that fingerprints and physio-patterns checked, the mistake was the most natural thing in the world."

"There must have been some differences."

"Of course. Now that I see you I realize that he didn't have that Martian habit of taking slow deep breaths of our Earth air. And he walked a little differently, as if he were accustomed to our gravity. He was either a native Earthman, or he had acquired Earth habits. We should have noticed it, but we were a bit slow on the uptake."

It was a welcome novelty to hear someone else make that particular confession. Correll said, "Have you learned how the records were substituted?"

"No. But on the basis of the information I've acquired, I don't think that any one in the Department is guilty. There's been no evidence of wrongdoing, and no one has run for cover. I'm beginning to believe that an outsider must have done the job."

"How?"

The giant sighed. "There you have me, Mr. Correll. I don't know how. Our routine here is a bit specialized. It wouldn't have been easy to slip in here, change the records unsuspected, and then slip out again."

"It might have been done by someone on the inside."

"That's possible, of course. However, you let us worry about that, Mr. Correll." Hjalmar hesitated. "What I have to say, as you may have gathered, is of a confidential nature. Not that any of it would be much use to those whom I may call 'our enemies.' They probably know more about it than we do. But it isn't information that should be made public. At the present stage, it would do little more than create unrest, and possible panic."

"Then why tell me about it?"

"Because it's something that Mars should know. And in view of the fact that there's no special government body fitted to cope with the problems involved, I imagine that your own Commerce Department will have to handle them, as we've been forced to do here. I don't know whether the problems have risen on Mars yet, but if they haven't, they will eventually. And you had better be prepared."

CORRELL said, "I'd much prefer to be left out of this, Mr. Hjalmar. I'm not fitted for intrigue. I'm, shall I say, too naive. And I'm beginning to think, too slow-witted."

"You're too modest. We're none of us fitted for this kind of work. Fortunately, it may not require any special fitness. As for you, Mr. Correll, we're asking you to do two things. First, to act as a contact man between us and Mars, and to report to your own Department exactly what we've learned. You won't take notes, of course. You'll just remember what I tell you."

"And second?"

"Keep yourself safe. Stay out of danger, if you can, until you return to Mars. That may be a little more difficult than it seems."

"I don't know. No one has tried to harm me so far."

"That depends on what you call harm. For a good part of the time you've been on Earth, you've been a prisoner."

"That sounds odd, Mr. Hjalmar, coming from you."

"Strictly speaking, your arrest wasn't our doing." The man stood up, his huge bulk knocking a pad off his desk. He picked it up as if such clumsiness had become a habit. "It was the inevitable result of what our enemies had done. They counted on our holding you, and we did exactly what they expected. In future, however, they may imprison you themselves. That would upset our plans considerably."

"You might put me in protective custody again," Correll said thoughtfully.

"After the excitement of last night, I returned to my cell to sleep. It wasn't a bad place, once I knew that I could leave when I wanted to."

"That would be impracticable, in view of the commercial negotiations you have still to carry out. I think that the best thing to do would be to have you trailed by our men. If you don't mind."

"And if I do?"

"You'll still be followed. For your own sake. Now that we agree on that," said Hjalmar with a heavy smile, "let me get down to some of the information I want to give you. As you know, such things as war and racial strife have been things of the past on Earth ever since the end of the twentieth century. And they've never even been known on Mars. The average person who heard about such things would be confused, simply because he couldn't understand how any sane person could entertain such an idea."

"So far you've said nothing new, Mr. Hjalmar."

"Then I can go on. Absurd as the idea seems, we have among the people of Earth a race of what a few of us have taken to calling 'Supermen.' They differ from ordinary people in significant ways. And they realize their difference sufficiently to have formed an organization of their own. We know very little about this organization."

"I call these individuals, 'Supermen'—by the way, they may include 'Superwomen' also, but we have no evidence on that point—because they have powers that most of us lack. They are stronger, move more rapidly, and note this, *think* more rapidly. They can do things with a speed before which we find ourselves helpless."

"As I said, they have an organization. We have none to combat them. Most of our prisoners, as you may have noted, are psychological cases, and need medical treatment more than anything else. We confine them temporarily to keep them from harming others, and occasionally, as the result of a misunder-

standing, shall we say, we confine people like yourself. But taking all kinds of cases together, we have relatively few prisoners. The prison you saw can accommodate a thousand, and is adequate to the needs of a population of twenty million."

"As crime is so rare, our police force is almost non-existent. It carries out the simple function of arrest when a crime has been committed or is about to be committed, but it has no elaborate organization to track down clever criminals. Such criminals haven't existed for centuries, and our knowledge of old-time police methods has been allowed to die out. That is why, as I have indicated, the only widespread organization capable of tackling these problems is the Commerce Department itself, which covers our globe just as your covers Mars."

"Back to these 'Supermen.' Incidents like that in the department store, but often of a more serious nature, have been happening for some time. The knowledge that such things have occurred, and rumors about the details have contributed to popular unrest and uneasiness. But the most important bit of knowledge is a frustrating one: we know almost nothing because our 'Supermen' friends are smart enough to keep us from knowing."

"Whenever they reveal themselves by some exploit, they annihilate or take prisoner the people who have learned about them. In cases where certain information about them has been printed and distributed, it has disappeared from circulation before reaching the people for whom it was intended, and the individuals who have supplied it, printed it, or read it have disappeared also."

"Note this, Mr. Correll. Until yesterday we were unable to lay hands on a single one of these superindividuals. The one who finally fell into our hands yesterday did so as the result of an accident. We think he is the one you saw in that department store. We found him a few blocks away, asphyxiated by the

exhaust from an underground internal combustion engine which had inadvertently been left running."

HJALMAR paused to watch the effect of his words on Correll. "You will note that we didn't hold him long enough to learn much about him. With a speed I find incredible, his friends were able to plan and carry out a rescue. At the same time they released him from prison, they took with him the guards and the prison physician who had presumably learned a few facts we weren't supposed to know.

"Something similar happened during the robbery of the space freighter. We not only lost a cargo of goods, but also several guards who might have learned too much."

Correll said, "What secrets can they possibly have?"

"We can make a guess. Our one hope is that their organization is small. In that case, if we work rapidly, they can't handle all of us who learn about them. When the public is properly prepared, and there is little chance of panic, we'll have to enlist its support. In the meantime we'll have to develop our own organization, and when we do find out what's going on, spread the information so effectively they can no longer suppress it."

"What if they just lie low? You have no clue to them then."

"That isn't quite true. We have another line of approach, based on the assumption that they actually are some variant of ordinary human beings, and not creatures of an entirely non-human kind. The little we have learned indicates that's the case. Assuming that they grew up as human beings, then they must have shown some sign of their unusual abilities even in their earliest years. We are therefore making a systematic examination of school records to find clues to children who might have grown up to be superior. We intend to trace the subsequent careers of these individuals, find out where they

met each other in later life, and so on.

"One more point. Presumably they committed the robbery of that space freighter because they needed its cargo to make weapons. Now, in view of the fact that war has long been obsolete, whatever weapons they make will be entirely new. And their very unexpectedness will make them a special danger."

"So they're supermen equipped with superweapons," said Correll.

"I'm afraid it may turn out to be something like that."

"I hope you're wrong. In any case, I'll inform my superiors on Mars."

"If you can. I don't want to exaggerate your personal danger, but judging from the past, I have an idea that they'll try to get at you."

"I'll do my best to stop them."

"Yes, but remember—they'll act fast. Now, back to your original mission."

THEY discussed the transactions of the exchange of goods between Mars and Earth, but for once Correll didn't have his entire mind on his work. He was thinking about the fantastic idea of "Supermen."

The idea that there might be such mutations among human beings, he recalled hazily, had been widespread in the twentieth century. All sorts of results had been expected when germ plasm was subjected to radioactivity. People had expected the progeny of an irradiated generation to have two heads or four arms, to have arms or legs of new shapes and new capabilities, to have new brains. They had forgotten that living things had been bombarded by cosmic rays ever since life had first originated on Earth, and that outlandish and freakish creatures, once born, did not usually survive. They recalled this only later on, when widespread radioactivity failed to have the expected effect, and human generation after human generation was born normal.

That now, after all this time, a new human variant had arisen seemed barely

possible. Perhaps, he thought, some new factor had begun to affect the human race. If there was, Hjalmar's statistical study of the school records might turn it up. In the meantime, he wished that he knew more about the so-called "Supermen" whose organization could strike so effectively. He knew only that the danger, if it came at all, would strike without warning and with inhuman speed.

As he left Hjalmar and entered the street outside the Commerce Department Building, he became aware of the two men following him. One lagged about fifty feet behind him, the other about twice that distance. Hjalmar's men, of course. He wondered how effective their protection would be.

He wondered how much of the truth Hjalmar had told him. For all Correll knew, more than a little of his original distrust remained in the burly giant's mind. Perhaps the men were watching him more to make sure that he did not contact their enemies than to guard him from danger.

Looking around him, he decided that the street on which he was walking was pleasant, but dull. Here and there small parks and neatly laid out recreation circles relieved the monotony of government offices and dwellings. There were few people to be seen. Correll looked at his watch. It was eleven o'clock. This morning, at least, his sense of time was in order.

It was as he passed one of the small parks that he saw her again.

She was sitting on a bench, staring up at one of the buildings. He caught a quick glimpse of her profile before she looked away, but that was all he needed. She was as placidly beautiful as when he had first seen her. Now, as then, she seemed to be occupied with her own thoughts. She was the girl he had seen at the spaceport, the girl he had glimpsed when he had been kidnapped.

He knew at once that he didn't want to direct the attention of Hjalmar's men to her. The realization that this was how he felt surprised him, and he felt a

need to rationalize it. There was no evidence, he told himself, that she was one of their "enemies." There seemed to be two factions of the "Supermen," and she might well be on the side of the normal human beings. Hadn't Hjalmar said that he had seen no indication of "Superwomen?" She might have been a prisoner, as he himself had been. He didn't want to bring her to the attention of Hjalmar's men.

If he spoke to her at all, he wanted to do it without Hjalmar's knowing. There was, as he had heard said, a certain glamor about Earth women, a certain charm which Martians had not yet acquired. He knew that he wanted to talk to her—alone.

A FEW dozen feet beyond her bench he stopped, and gazed casually up at one of the buildings. He noticed, without seeming to, that the men watching him had also come to a stop. He entered the building knowing that the men following him would be in a dilemma. There were helicopter platforms both at the halfway level and on the roof of every large building. The men would have to watch both platforms and the exit itself in order to make sure that they kept him in sight. And there were only two of them.

Five minutes later, from the halfway platform which had the tiny drive-it-yourself copters for hire, he took off. A few seconds later he settled down on the street in front of the bench where the girl was still sitting.

This time, he told himself, he was not being slow-witted. She was the girl for him. She smiled at him and said, "I've been expecting you."

"You saw me?"

"I've been keeping track of you. I wanted to speak to you."

"Arwon sent you?"

She nodded, and he was disappointed. There was no personal feeling involved on her part. Her instructions were to find him, and she had. Why not, he asked himself. He had no illusions about

himself. He was just an ordinary Martian doing what should have been an ordinary job, and there was nothing about him to attract her interest.

She rose and climbed carefully into the copter. "Do you mind if I take the controls?" she asked. "I know a place where we can talk."

"I'm afraid I know it too."

"No, not where you were before. I think you'll like this place."

"Suppose we're followed? Didn't you notice there were two men trailing me?"

"Not any more. I saw you lead them into that building. Even if you hadn't, they would not have interrupted us."

So she wasn't alone in this! Her assistants were evidently more skilled in this kind of work than Hjalmar's men, for Correll hadn't even suspected their presence.

He said, "All right, take the controls."

"Thank you." A smile flickered on her face as she turned her attention to piloting the copter. He wondered what they would have to talk about, if talk they must. He would have been satisfied just to look at her.

Somewhere in the suburbs, she landed on the roof of an inn, and then she led him down to the office on the top floor. Whether the manager knew her or not, he smiled his greeting as a manager should.

Correll stood aside as she exchanged a few words with the man. He heard her murmur, "My husband and I," and for the moment he was conscious of a painful shock of disappointment. He should have known. Whatever charm she had was to be turned on Correll as a weapon, to coax him to do what she wanted. And now they were to meet her husband.

A mechanical bellboy rolled on three wheels toward their room, and she turned to Correll with a smile and said, "Come along, dear."

"Dear?" With an even greater shock, it struck him that he was supposed to be her husband. So that was how she had planned to secure privacy! By pretending they were married!

HE FOLLOWED her in a daze. The bellboy tilted over and a small valise slid to the floor. He realized it was supposed to be his luggage, sent on beforehand. Obviously she had made preparations for him long before he had left Hjalmar's office.

The door closed behind the bellboy. Again he felt that he was no longer slow or dull. "Is this our honeymoon?" Correll asked smiling.

Her manner seemed to change. She laughed gaily, if a little nervously, and he was more conscious of her charm than ever. "Not quite," she said. "We're here to do some serious talking. Do you mind?"

"I certainly do. By the way, under what name have we registered?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Correll—I hope there's no Mrs. Correll who might misunderstand."

"No, but there's a Mr. Correll who's very perplexed about the whole thing. Pleased, but perplexed."

"I think he'll get things straight after a while. For your information, my name is Medlana. As my, ah-er, husband, I guess you ought to know."

"Most convenient. Very well then. Since we can't get on with pleasure, let's get along with the business!"

She said gravely. "That will be a pleasure in itself. However, I must begin by apologizing. I'm afraid you can't have a high opinion of us."

"Don't say that. What's a little kidnapping and robbery between friends?"

"I suppose that it won't help to point out that you were released unharmed?"

"In the meantime someone else pretended to be me—you can't expect me to like that."

"I can't blame you for that. Still, it was necessary. Our enemies are alert as well as able."

"You mean the Commerce Department?"

"Not the Commerce Department. I mean these individuals whom you call 'Supermen.'"

"Aren't you part of them?"

She shook her head. "They are our enemies as well as yours. We are not, as Mr. Hjalmar seems to think, a rival group within their ranks, or they within ours. We are completely separate."

"You seem to know a lot about Hjalmar. What sort of organization is yours?"

"I can't tell you—yet. All I can say is that we were in existence for many years before this other group arose. We foresaw that they would come into being, and though we couldn't prevent it,

us. And we can be of use to you and Mars."

"All I can see," he said, "is that you want me to go into this thing blindly. We haven't advanced an inch from what Arwon told me. And my answer is going to be the same."

MEDLANA looked at him in silence. "I understand how you feel," she said finally. "But in view of what you have seen, and what you must have learned from Hjalmar, I thought you would understand the sort of enemies you face, and that you would do everything in your power to fight them."

"I realize I have enemies. But you haven't convinced me that you and your group are my friends. Prove that, and I'll be with you."

"Can't you tell by talking to us whether or not we're sincere? You spoke to Arwon."

"Obviously a sick man."

"You spoke to me."

"Obviously a charming woman." He was surprised at his boldness—at his sudden quickness of mind. "If it were up to me, I shouldn't mind if this marriage were real, instead of a fiction for the sake of privacy. I shouldn't mind it at all. I'm no great judge of character, Medlana. I don't pretend to see what lies under charm. My enemies may very well have a charming agent or two. The question is, which is which, and what do you both stand for?"

"I'd like to tell you, but I can't. Not yet. Not until we're sure you can be trusted."

"Then it's a stalemate, because I won't be on your side until I'm convinced it's worth fighting for. I suppose you need me to arrange for more products like those that were stolen."

She nodded.

"I won't do it."

"I was afraid you wouldn't." She stood up. "And I'm afraid that if I haven't been able to change your mind, there's little that further argument can do."

"You mean," he said incredulously,



"Say, would you like to see something interesting?"

we did take the steps to guard against the danger they threatened."

Correll laughed. "As you put it, the situation's simple enough. You're the good ones, and they're the bad ones."

"I'm afraid that's it."

"What's good about you, and what's bad about them?"

"They want power. We seek only to protect ourselves."

"Protect yourselves from what?"

"From the results of our weakness."

"I don't understand that at all. What is your weakness?"

"You will learn later, once you agree to help us. You can be of great use to

"that's all you wanted to talk about?"

"There was another purpose—to protect you from our common enemy."

"If our enemies were following, I hardly think that they were thrown off the trail by that short copter flight."

"They may not have expected it," she replied. "Now, let me ask one favor of you. Let me leave here first. Will you wait a few moments before you follow me?"

Correll assented with a wry smile.

"Thank you." She gave him her hand, and for what seemed a long moment he held it, thinking that it was a silly way to part, and that if he allowed himself to act naturally he would kiss her whether she wanted him to or not. While he was trying to decide, she took her hand away, and said, "Good-by."

Slow on the uptake as usual, he thought bitterly to himself as she walked to the door. "Good-by," he said, hating the finality of the word.

Medlana picked up the valise and closed the door behind her. As the sound of her footsteps died away, he glanced at his watch. To his annoyance, the watch had stopped. He waited for what seemed half an hour before he followed her. Near the clerk's desk he encountered the manager, who asked politely whether he had enjoyed his night's rest.

"Very much," he responded mechanically. It struck him that the manager was mad. Night's rest? They had arrived before twelve, and spent not more than an hour or two in the room. There had been no night.

He caught sight of an electric calendar-clock on the wall, and stopped short. He had arrived on the fifteenth and seen Hjalmar the next day. Unless the calendar lied, it was now the seventeenth. And the electric calendar-clocks, with their astronomical information, and their compensation for time differences between Earth and other inhabited planets, did not all go out of order at the same time.

He had lost almost a full day. It was the same thing that had happened be-

fore, only worse. And there was no explanation for it—unless the fact that he had been talking to Medlana was an explanation. Come to think of it, the first time it had happened had been just after he talked to Arwon...

He'd have to talk to Hjalmar about this. There was no lapse in his memory of what had occurred. He could send his mind back and recall everything he had done, minute by minute—but somehow, hours had been lifted from his life.

He was still wondering about it as he rode along in a rented copter when a shadow fell in front of his eyes. Another copter had settled over his, and as he stared in stupefaction, he saw a man leap from the other to his own. The man moved so rapidly that he was in the seat alongside Correll before Correll realized what was happening.

Even as he tried to move, he knew that it was too late. The other man's movements were so rapid that they seemed a blur. An arm swung, something exploded on his head, and he realized with a dim sense of relief that here was a method of making time pass that he could understand, an old, infallible method. . . .

IV

HE AWOKE on a sofa, as comfortable as if he had been taking a nap. There was no headache, no pain of any kind. As he looked around him, he thought there was something wrong with his eyes.

Then he realized that it wasn't his eyes, it was the door. For some reason which he didn't understand, it was circular and it glittered. But he had no time to examine it, for someone asked casually, "Feel all right?"

"Where am I?"

Another, a fat, bald individual with a large forehead, laughed and said, "Why is that always the first thing they ask?"

"Because they want to know," snapped his partner, who was thinner, but equally bald. Correll saw now that

there were five men, all playing cards. The man said, "We're prisoners, Correll. Yes, we know your name. They told us. They also told us you'd be all right when you woke up. I'm Twisden, and my fat friend here is Clayton. That's probably about all you're capable of absorbing in your present state, but for the record, these three gentlemen are Dannon, Nairn and Klomer. They'll reintroduce themselves later, when you're interested."

"You still haven't told him where he is," chuckled Clayton.

"This is what is known as the recreation room," said Twisden. "See that door? Wherever you see one like that, keep away, or you'll have your head cut off. Anyplace else, you may go as you please."

"Why am I here?"

"Probably for the same reason we're all here. Because we know too much. Or rather, because we *might* know too much. Some of us don't even know what we know. But they regard us as dangerous, and take no chances of information getting to the outside world."

"What are we supposed to do here?"

"Sleep and kill time. It's hell," said Twisden.

"Not a bad life at all," murmured Clayton.

"For people who have your capacity for sleep."

"There's an alternative," said Clayton.

"To hell with the alternative," said Twisden, taking in a trick.

They played silently for a while, and Correll pulled his thoughts together. Here were people who presumably had important information he didn't have. The conclusion seemed obvious. "In view of the fact that we all know too much," he suggested, "would there be any objection to our putting it all together?"

Dannon, who was short and saturnine, emitted a laugh that seemed shorter than he was. "We've tried that already, my friend. No use. You see, they keep pretty good records of us,

and they take care to put together those of us who know about the same things. Put our five heads together—even include a sixth like your own, and the dozen or so other heads you'll find in the adjoining rooms—and you won't get much further than any one of us individually. Now, if we could get together with some one from a different part of the building—"

"We can't," said Twisden. "There are those damned doors."

Correll approached the door, and stared at it closely. He saw now why it glittered. It consisted of what appeared to be a blade or blades of bright metal whirling rapidly around in a vertical plane. He wondered why any one would think of making a door like that. It was effective, no doubt, in keeping people away, but an ordinary locking door would have been just as effective. And this seemed to have serious weaknesses. What would happen, for instance, if he were to thrust a piece of metal into it?

HE LOOKED around. There were no pieces of metal to be seen. There was nothing but the furniture, all plastic, whether chairs or table or sofa. Comfortable, but not exceptionally strong.

Nevertheless, there was an experiment he had to try. He picked up a chair and approached the door. The men looked up from their cards at that, and Twisden said, "Save yourself the trouble. We've been through that."

"I always like to see for myself."

He thrust the chair legs into the whirling blades.

They kept on whirling. They sliced through the plastic as if it had been so much butter, and one of the flying pieces narrowly missed Clayton's face. He said plaintively, "Be careful there, Correll, I've got a good hand." And went on playing.

A voice boomed from overhead. "Get away from that door, Correll."

He looked up. Someone was glaring angrily at him from a slit high up in

the wall. Someone quite ordinary-looking, not at all superior to ordinary men. Correll said, "Don't mind me. I have a scientific mind."

"So have we. And we're in a better position to experiment. Try that once more and you'll be locked away by yourself!"

"Don't worry, I'll pay for the chair."

"Yes, and are you going to make out my report for me too? You ought to have more sense than to make work. Pick yourself up and take a look at the place, play cards, do something. Just don't be a nuisance."

"Carey's overworked as it is," said Twisden, without looking up. "Ever since he joined them, he's been overworked. It's much better than being underworked."

The slit closed, and Correll shrugged. There seemed to be no escape through the door. He might as well take the proffered advice and look through their prison house.

Except for the trick doors, scattered unexpectedly here and there to keep the prisoners from wandering into the wrong places, it seemed like an ordinary building, built on a four-sectional plan. A good twenty rooms, at least, made of tough fireproof plastic which had been intruded into a giant mold and quickly hardened. It looked much less like a prison than the one in which he had been confined after that mixup with the Commerce Department.

There were people in each of the five rooms to which he had access, some reading, others playing games. They differed in various ways, but they all seemed bored, and not too excited at the thought of meeting someone new. They were all men, and Correll gathered that if there were women prisoners at all, they were imprisoned separately, behind one of the glittering doors.

One of the unbarred doorways led unexpectedly to the open air. Not quite open, however. As Correll stepped outside, he noticed overhead a plastic dome with one-way transparency. He could

see the sky. But he could also see the vague outline overhead of what looked like trees and bushes, and realized that to those looking down from above, the camouflaged dome would appear to be nothing more than part of a simple country landscape.

A FEW feet away from the door, the ground was laid out in what appeared to be a vegetable garden.

There were tomato plants, and onions, and potatoes. There were others, apparently less prosaic, whose names he didn't know. He had passed the tomato plants first and had been rather surprised to see them. The tomatoes on them were small, green in color, and not very decorative. They were about the size of marbles, he estimated, and wouldn't be ready to eat for weeks. He moved around, eventually to reach the smooth wall of plastic that enclosed the garden, and barred the way to the outside world. Then he turned back. He perceived that during the half hour that had passed since he had first seen them, the tomatoes had grown! They were definitely larger now, and on one or two of them he could see a faint flush of red! It was incredible.

The other plants had grown too. The skewer-like onion shoots, only six inches out of the ground when he first noticed them, were now one and a half times their previous height.

He stayed in the garden for two hours, watching the onion shoots push their way up, the tomatoes ripen, the other plants flower and form fruit. The time of maturation seemed to have been carefully calculated. At the proper moment, a bell would ring, and then, from pipes in the ground near the plants, a spray would shoot into the air, and further change would come to a stop.

At the end of two hours, Carey, the man who had been annoyed at his breaking the chair, came out into the garden and gathered the small harvest. He had no weapon, and disregarded Correll's presence as if he knew that he had noth-

ing to fear.

Correll returned to the house. Near one of the glittering dangerous doors he noticed a small sign: Electronic Laboratories. Near another was a sign: Plant Growth Laboratories. He wondered what sort of research was being conducted here.

In the recreation room he found that the card game had ceased for lack of interest. The five men were sitting around morosely, at a loss for things to do with themselves. The broken chair had been replaced.

"How long have all of you been here?" asked Correll.

"A year for me," said Clayton. "More or less."

"A half year for me," said Twisden. "Don't you notice that I'm full of pep? The others have been here almost two years. That's why they won't bother to answer—you."

"What's the idea? Why are we here?"

"We know, or once knew, things that are considered dangerous to our super-friends. We also seem to be of potential use to them. They want people to do their dirty work for them. This is their way of convincing us."

"It doesn't seem very persuasive."

"That's because you haven't been here long," said Clayton grimly. "Do you know what torture boredom can be? Here you're never allowed to work, never allowed to lift a finger to help yourself. The only thing they let us do is feed ourselves. And they may stop letting us do that soon."

"Prisoners have faced similar problems before," said Correll. "They've been able to handle them. They've organized classes, discussed plans of escape."

"That's useless here," replied Twisden shortly. "In the first place, we're grouped in such a way that our interests are incompatible. Not our temperament, note, or else we'd be at each other's throats all the time and end up altogether hopeless, but our interests. They don't overlap enough. And we don't

have such things as paper and pencils, or blackboards."

"You have books."

"All of the time-killing variety. No science, no good poetry or anything like that. They even let us look at television—but again, only at the time-killing programs. Comedy, if it's bad enough, children's programs, stuff of that sort. We're so sick of it we don't turn on our sets any more. They emphasize the monotony without relieving it."

"I don't get it," said Correll. "If they really wanted to drive us mad, they'd put us in solitary."

"They don't want that. Once in a while, they do put us in solitary, but only to discipline us when we show too much pep."

"There's only one thing to do. Talk about how to escape."

CLAYTON and Twisden laughed without amusement. "Nobody likes to talk about useless things," said Twisden. "There's no escaping from here. Our jailers are too super for us. In certain cases where it's needed to keep up morale, they allow us to *dream* of escape. They did that with Kloner before we got here. They had someone drop a metal object on the floor near him. Kloner thought they had been careless, and treasured the thing for weeks. It was the one piece of metal in the place.

"He began to keep an eye on the doors, and noticed that they seemed to be slowing down. Well, one day he and his friends took what they thought was their chance. They managed to break a door-blade, and our supermen played along with the poor fools. They allowed Kloner and the others to get outside the grounds before picking them up. When Kloner and his friends realized what had been done to them, they lost hope altogether. The others gave in and agreed to work for our captors. Kloner didn't give in, but he gave up trying to escape. Show him a chance to get away now, and he won't take it. He won't believe that it's real."

"What sort of work do they actually want of us?"

"Almost anything we can do. They emphasize interesting research in botany and electronics. Frankly, Correll, we haven't learned very much about them since we've come here. They don't seem to be vicious. Apparently they don't kill, except possibly in self-defense, and in that and other ways they seem to be like us. But in physical power, and in speed of thought, we don't come up to them. That's why I don't understand why they need us. Their research would probably be ten times as efficient as ours. Why call on us to help them?"

"They may be limited in numbers," suggested Correll.

"Or they may want us for menial jobs."

Something was happening in the next room. Correll walked to the open doorway and looked in. Three men lying on a large table like so many corpses were being wheeled in by Carey. As Correll watched, Carey lifted them off the table to sofas, said gruffly, "They'll be awake in fifteen minutes," and then left.

"Newcomers," commented Correll.

"Our superfriends have been moving again. Wonder what these fellows did."

They seemed to have little genuine curiosity about it, and Correll wondered if he too would have the same deadened feelings once he had been here as long as they had. Compared to the busy life to which he had been accustomed the paralyzing inactivity of this place might be just the kind of vacation he needed, provided it didn't last too long. It would certainly give him a rest and leave him anxious to get to work again—but not to work for his captors.

After a few minutes the newcomers began to stir uneasily and then sat up, to stare around them and demand as he himself had done. "Where am I?"

Twisden laughed, and said, "In hell. Didn't believe it existed, did you?"

"You're prisoners," stated Correll flatly. "We're all prisoners."

"Well, they can't do this to me," said one of the men belligerently. "All we did was try to deliver a letter to the C.D." He was tall and tough-looking, with a rangy frame that to Correll indicated both speed and power, and he was in an obviously bad temper. "My wife's waiting for me at home, and I promised to get back early. Nobody's going to keep me in this place."

AT THAT moment there was the sound of a loud sneaker. A voice said, "This is your daily chance to speak up. Anybody want to get out of here?"

"I do," replied the newcomer loudly.

The voice went on as if the speaker hadn't heard him. It was a peculiar voice, thought Correll, speaking in normal tones at a normal rate, but in a most abnormal manner. It seemed all staccato, not only every syllable, but every vowel sound and every consonant sharp and clipped. "If you're bored, tired of doing nothing, here's your chance to be useful, to do interesting research, or any other work you choose, and at a good salary with a chance for advancement."

"I'm not doing any work," asserted the newcomer. "But I'm getting out anyway."

"All those who are willing to accept my offer please stand near the door that leads to the electronic laboratory."

Two men, looking rather shamefaced, moved over to the designated door. The others regarded them with more pity than anger. "Guess they couldn't take it any more," observed Clayton.

The tough newcomer exchanged glances with his newly arrived companions. "Come on, boys," he said gently.

This might be something to watch, Correll moved over to a part of the room where his view of the door would be unobstructed.

The glitter of the whirling blade was dulled for a single flash, and then a man stood in front of it. In some miraculous way, he had come past the blade unharmed, with as little trouble as an ordi-

nary man would pass through a turnstile. His speed, thought Correll, must be that of lightning.

It was the man who had caught his interest in the department store. He stood there quietly for no more than half a second, but in that brief time Correll recognized him. He had a slender frame and a rather thin face, with eyes that glittered like those of the bearded prophet.

"Pappas," muttered Twisden. "He was away yesterday. But he's back."

He must also be the one who had been temporarily imprisoned, thought Correll. He watched as Pappas gestured to the two men who had volunteered to work, motioning them to one side.

The tough newcomer had greeted his arrival with a growl of anger. "Okay, pal," he said. "You in charge here? What's the idea of snatching us? What's the idea of keeping us here?"

Pappas didn't deign to reply. He said, so quickly that Correll could hardly understand the words, "Any other volunteers?" It was the same voice that had asked for volunteers before, but it was no longer staccato.

The tough newcomer clenched his jaws, and muttered, "You asked for it, pal." And he threw himself at Pappas, at the same moment that his friends tackled the man from the other side.

Pappas became a blur. He moved so rapidly he was practically invisible. Correll saw the three men who had tackled him go flying in different directions. One of them hit the wall and slid to the floor. The others landed smack on the floor and stayed there.

The whirling blade of the door came to a sudden stop, and Pappas led out the two men who had volunteered for work. As they departed, the blade began to spin again.

"We live and learn," remarked Twisden philosophically to the unconscious bodies of the three men. "We all live and learn."

From outside there came a sudden shout, and the prisoners near the whirl-

ing door stiffened to sudden attention. There was the sound of a single shot, the noise of feet running.

"They're having a little trouble in there," said Correll. He turned to the others. "If ever there was a time for us to do something, this is it. Come on."

"How are you getting past the door?" demanded Twisden.

The door again. Correll picked up a chair, and slammed at the center, at the point where the revolving blades were moving most slowly. The chair bounced back, minus a leg that had been caught by the blades. "It's no use, my friend," said Clayton. "It's no use. Haven't you learned yet that you can't get out of this place?"

And then the door shattered, and the sharp pieces of glittering steel whizzed past their heads.

V

A ROBOT stood in the doorway. It had to stoop as it walked through the unbarred entrance, and behind it came another robot. Inside the room, the robots separated, each seeking for another door guarded by a whirling blade. They shattered these as they had done the first, simply by walking through them. And then they disappeared into the other rooms.

"Our superfriends have been out-matched by these robots," said Correll. "Let's start moving."

"It may be just a trick," said Clayton unbelievably.

"You've been stupefied by inactivity," replied Correll with impatience. "Even if it's a trick, we've nothing to lose by it. This may be our chance!"

He moved cautiously through the unguarded doorway and found himself in a corridor from which half a dozen rooms branched off. Walking the length of the corridor, he reached the front door. This was unlocked. He opened it and stared at what was going on outside.

The first thing he heard was the voice

of Pappas, coming so fast that he was unable to distinguish the words, but almost undoubtedly cursing. Pappas seemed to be doing acrobatic stunts of some indeterminate nature. A hundred feet away was a large transport helicopter, sliding gently back and forth on the ground like a ship tossing in the waves.

It didn't make sense. It didn't make sense even when Pappas stopped struggling and sat there on the ground in the quiet despair of complete frustration. Correll took a step away from the house—and sat down with a thud that he felt from the base of his spine to the base of his skull.

The ground looked normal, but it was incredibly slippery. Correll had walked on sheet ice on Mars, on ice so slippery that the slightest departure from the vertical was sure to lead to a loss of balance. But this was worse. It was impossible to get the slightest grip on it, or to push himself along in any direction. The motion of the helicopter was the tipoff. The fact that despite its weight it too had a frictionless contact with the ground was proved by its swaying under the action of the shifting wind. Pappas was helpless, but no more helpless than the prisoners, who found it impossible to leave the house.

It was just as Correll became convinced of this that the robots reappeared. One of the robots was carrying the unconscious Medlana. So she had been captured too, thought Correll. But he had no time to find out what had happened to her. The robots stepped out of the house as if the ground was the same as usual, without slipping at all, and headed for another small helicopter that Correll now noticed for the first time. A few seconds later, the copter took off, leaving jailer and prisoners alike helpless.

Pappas had begun to curse when Correll had his bright idea. There was nothing slow about him now, he thought, with a sudden elation. He was no "superman" like Pappas, but his mind had

moved faster than that of the latter. And though Pappas would catch on soon enough from the example Correll set him, meanwhile—

What Correll had done was take off his shoe and throw it at the house as hard as he could.

A gun with a strong recoil would have been better, he thought, but with no gun at hand, this was the best he could do. Action equalled reaction, he had remembered. It was the principle on which rockets and rocket-driven ships operated. As the shoe flew off in one direction, his body moved in the other. It slid not fast but at a steady pace, unslowed by any friction with the ground. As the wind veered around and almost brought him to a stop, he tossed his other shoe. If necessary he'd strip himself bare, but sooner or later the method would get him away from the house and its slipperiness.

This time the wind was favorable, and he slid steadily until the ground itself brought him to a stop. That meant that the contact with the ground was now frictional, and putting his hands out cautiously, he confirmed the fact that he had reached the limit of the slippery area. Now it was easy to pull himself a few feet further, and then climb slowly to his feet.

Looking back, he saw that Pappas was gone. The man had caught the idea at once, and had been able to act on it more rapidly than Correll had done. But he hadn't been the only one. The entire area around the house was covered with prisoners trying to escape by the same method Correll himself had devised.

Correll didn't wait to see how many of them succeeded. He noticed that the air around the house was becoming foggy, and he suspected that some sort of defense mechanism was coming into play. He picked himself up and ran.

A short distance down the road he found a small cottage. The man and woman stared at his stockinged feet in surprise, but Correll had no time to be apologetic. "Have to use your phone," he

gasped, and as they put up no objection, he pressed the necessary button, and a few seconds later was waiting for the men from the Commerce Department to arrive.

HJALMAR himself was the first man to land. As he lifted his great body out of the copter, he said, "The place is full of fog, and we can't see a thing. We'll have to wait for infrared equipment."

"If you wait too long, they'll get away."

"Easy, Correll, we're moving as fast as we can."

But it was another quarter of an hour before infrared searchlights and special goggles arrived, and when the groups of Hjalmar's men finally converged on the house, it was to find the place empty, except for the still unconscious tough man whom Pappas had knocked out. He'd keep his appointment with his mother-in-law after all, thought Correll.

They went through room after room. All were empty. Even the laboratories had been cleaned out. Correll led the way through the garden, and found the plants either dying or already dead, as they might have been under normal conditions at the end of autumn.

He turned gloomily to Hjalmar. "You've missed your chance," he said. "If you had acted rapidly, you'd have got some of their equipment, along with a few of their prisoners."

"We acted as fast as we could," replied Hjalmar. "And we didn't do quite as badly as you think. We traced their direction of escape by radar. After a while they threw up an anti-radar barrier, but I think we know enough about them to figure out where their general headquarters is. We're making progress, Correll, real progress."

"I wonder."

"Of course," said the giant gently, "we might make even more progress if you took the trouble to cooperate with us, instead of shaking off the men I assigned to protect you."

"I doubt it." Correll grinned. "Were they really assigned to protect me or to keep a watch on me?"

"Suppose we say both."

"Suppose we say that I prefer not to be watched. I wanted to meet someone who also didn't want to be observed. She's the girl I met at the spaceport, the same one who was at the place to which I was first taken."

"One of our supergroups?"

"She says they aren't. She claims that they're entirely different." He repeated to Hjalmar what Medlana had told him.

Hjalmar shook his head. "We know even less about this group than about the others. Apparently they've kept under cover even more."

"What do you think this weakness she mentioned can be?"

Hjalmar said slowly, "We can't tell. It may be the same thing that made that bearded man drop unconscious when you spoke to him. But this girl—"

"Seemed quite ordinary."

Hjalmar's eyebrows went up. "Really? From the way you spoke I gathered a different impression. She seems to have made you lose considerable time out of your life."

"Yes, I still don't understand that."

"Drugs, obviously," said Hjalmar. "The effect may or may not be significant. However, we'll be able to tell more about it later. The thing I want to do now is get back to my office and study some of the reports that have been coming in."

ON THE flight back to the Commerce Department, Correll sat in silence. Hjalmar was right, of course, some drug had been used on him. It might have been released into the air in front of him, both on that first occasion when he had been taken prisoner, and also when he had spoken to Medlana. But why?

The question seemed insoluble in his present state of mind. What he needed more than anything else right now was a good rest.

Hjalmar agreed. When the helicopter landed, Correll noticed that it was on the roof of the jail. They had a safe cell ready for him, and for once the hours on Earth passed rapidly without leaving him wondering where they had gone.

When he saw Hjalmar the next day, the big man was cheerful and energetic. "We've located their headquarters," he said.

"When are you going to capture them?" asked Correll.

"Unfortunately, it's not as simple as that. They happen to have picked a rather safe place—for them. It's an atoll in the Pacific which has recently been used for nuclear experiments. Or rather, underwater, right off the atoll. They're safe from above. And it's dangerous to approach too closely from their own level."

"If that's the sort of headquarters they've chosen, they must be superbeings after all."

"No," said Hjalmar. "That's the funny part. They're different, but they're not superior. Not at all superior. In fact, in some respects they have serious handicaps."

"Handicaps? You should have seen Pappas handle those men who attacked him."

"Pappas isn't superior in physical strength. He just creates the illusion that he is."

"He's a master magician then. He certainly fooled me and those guys on the floor!"

"You don't understand," said Hjalmar. He pulled out a sheaf of papers. "I told you that I was checking on various records. You might be interested in the results so far. They indicate that a new variety of human being has come into existence. It differs from the normal human not in skin color or in shape of head, or in any other way you can see, but in its chemical processes—their metabolism is approximately ten times as fast as ours!"

"Take a look at the school and hospital records. Center your attention on

the case of pupil George Pappas. Born a little more than three years ago."

"The son of the one I met?"

"Not the son. *The man himself*. You don't get the idea, Correll. When I say that metabolism has been speeded up, I mean that *everything* has been speeded up. These people live about ten times as fast as we do. The records are incomplete, of course, precisely because of that reason. But the little that we have fits into a rather amazing picture. At the age of a few months, Pappas was ready to go to school. His parents knew that something was different about him, of course, and in enrolling him in his first classes, they falsified his age. But in school too he developed so quickly that the teachers couldn't help noticing it. He was considered an unusually gifted child, a genius. And he was not only too far ahead of the other children mentally, he was ahead of them physically as well. After a while he was removed from school altogether. He just didn't fit in, anyplace."

"When he dropped out of school, he dropped out of school records as well, and it won't be easy to trace his subsequent career. But putting together what we know about him, and about some of the others, the overall picture is something like this."

"The first high-speed human being dates back to about fifty-five years ago. There's a notation on the death certificate that the date of birth is in error, but we can see now that it wasn't in error at all. The man died at the age of twelve, apparently over a hundred years old. That will give you an idea of what their normal life span may be expected to be. The idea is borne out when I average about twenty other cases which seem to be representative. I get a figure, excluding accidental deaths, of 11.5 years. And the normal span of ordinary human beings is 106.7 years."

"A little better than one-tenth of normal," said Correll thoughtfully. "I'm beginning to see what you mean by their handicaps."

"I thought you would. One thing you'll have to remember, though, is that this ten to one ratio in metabolism doesn't extend to *all* physical functions. Certain movements they can make twenty or thirty times as fast as we can. But they can run only about five times as fast, and they can think only about four times as fast. Their auditory apparatus is much like ours. They hear and speak sounds of the same pitch that we do. They have a body temperature, however, about four degrees higher than our own."

"I can see another weakness," observed Correll. "Food. They have to eat ten times as much. That's why they're anxious to experiment with rapid-growing plants."

"Right. They eat faster, breathe faster, get tired faster, recuperate from illness faster. They can stand about ten times the dose of radioactivity that would be lethal to ordinary men because their bodies can handle the radioactive disintegration products so rapidly. For the same reason they should be invulnerable to some of the diseases that affect us, and especially vulnerable to others, particularly to disturbances in metabolism."

HJALMAR handed Correll the papers.

"Now, if you study carefully all that a higher metabolism rate implies, and I can assure you that we have experts doing that, you'll get a fair picture of their strengths and weaknesses. They have a great many physical adjustments to make to a world most of whose creatures move at a much slower rate. Still, we know of other animals which also grow to maturity and live their entire lives, not at a much higher metabolic level, it's true, but in a fraction of the time it takes man. I can think of dogs, cats and a host of other mammals. A dog at nine or ten months is as mature as the average boy or girl at sixteen. And the dog's life span is only a sixth or a seventh or less of what is now the human life span. But the dog does manage to

adjust, as the other animals do too, and as our new men would do if physical adjustment were the chief difficulty.

"But physical adjustment is just one phase of it. The real stumbling block that our new human variety has to get by is social. Imagine the rapid individuals trying to live in an environment in which all the people supposedly on a par with them seem to think and act in slow motion. From the beginning to end, they're up against frustration. Have you ever been forced into intimate contact with people who stop to think after each word they say, and at the same time find it impossible to understand what *you* say because you speak too rapidly for them? That's the situation of our fast individuals, or at least a shadow of their situation.

"Imagine Pappas as a school child. Between morning and afternoon he lives through several days. He gets tired, sleepy, unable to keep his eyes open. Before the eyes of his astonished class he takes a short nap—and is soon awake and alert again, as if he had a full night's rest. The teachers don't know what to make of him. They think he's seriously ill, victim of a strange disease. They write notes to his parents.

"Now, our speedy new individuals wouldn't find things so bad if they could live with others of their own kind. And eventually, they do come across each other, and form an organization for self-protection, if for no other purpose. But they're still few in number, and most of their activity has to be carried on among ordinary people. So they learn to conceal their true nature. They train themselves to move slowly, to speak slowly, to fit into the crowd. But the restraints they put on themselves by doing this are so severe that the tension keeps mounting. And sooner or later they do what Pappas did in that department store, they lose control, and do anything to escape. And it's from incidents like that that we learn what they can do."

Correll nodded. "I think that one of their chief troubles is in speaking. In

what was evidently a recording, Pappas's voice sounded strangely staccato. He couldn't have just slowed the record down, or that would have lowered the pitch of his voice and made it sound like a senseless mutter. I think that the staccato effect was produced by his speaking normally, then introducing a slight pause after each syllable on the recording, so that his overall rate would be one comprehensible to normal human beings. But when he spoke to us in person, even though he evidently tried to slow down, he was still incomprehensible."

Hjalmar rose from his desk, and paced up and down for a moment, his heavy face showing his excitement. He said finally, "It's an unexpected picture, and we were stupid not to have thought of it long ago. But we're beginning to get a few of the details now. Just a few, though."

"As for the overall effect, there are some important things we should know, and don't. What caused the formation, after so many thousands of years of human history, of a rapid-metabolism variant? We can only guess. Individuals like Pappas may have been born in the past and killed as freaks, or they may have died off for lack of sufficient food or for other reasons. At any rate, they're not dying off any longer. Now, their numbers are increasing."

"And that brings me to the most important point of all. Exactly what is the purpose of their organization? I can understand that they need each other to make their lives tolerable, to give each other companionship. But some of the things they've done go far beyond that. Their secrecy, their stealing of equipment, their getting people to work for them, everything indicates some other purpose."

"Now it seems to me that this purpose can be only one thing. World-domination in the old, stupid sense that we thought the human race had put behind it for ever. Not because they're stupid, but because they can't help themselves."

"They live a fraction of the time we

do. That means that the length of one of their generations is also a fraction of ours. Therefore, if they increase in numbers from one generation to the next in about the same ratio as we would increase, it won't take them many centuries to equal the entire normal human race in number."

"Let me make that clear. A few centuries back, we founded a colony on Mars of a hundred ordinary human beings. At the end of a generation, that colony had grown to two hundred, simply by the excess of births over deaths, making no allowance for further immigration. Suppose that the original colony had been of our rapid variant. Provided there had been enough food for them, the increase to two hundred would have taken place in about two years, which is one of *their* generations. Every two years the number would have doubled again, to four hundred, eight hundred, and so on, so that by the end of twenty years the original colony would have grown to a hundred thousand. At the end of forty years, to a hundred million."

"You can see the survival advantage this gives them in comparison with ordinary human beings. We might try to get them to limit their numbers—but on what grounds? Why should they voluntarily agree to limit themselves, when they would seem, in their own eyes, to be so obviously superior? As you have already seen, their speed gives them a tremendous advantage. At any moment, I don't think that Pappas could exert more muscular force than any of those men who attacked him. But he could move ten or twenty times as fast as they could, which meant that any blow he landed on them would have the effect of an exploding bombshell. And they couldn't lay a finger on him."

AT this Correll nodded. "So you think that it won't be easy to come to an agreement with them?"

"I think it will be difficult, if not impossible. That's why we have to organize

now, with all the speed we can manage, to protect ourselves. We don't want to start a deadly war any more than they do. But you can see that for either side it's hard to say where defense ends and attack begins."

Correll was silent for a moment. Then he said slowly, "Actually, we haven't tried to come to any agreement."

"Mostly because we haven't known what there was to agree about. I suppose we *will* try in future, though. But meanwhile, we'll have to prepare for the worst."

"And possibly bring it on by the very preparations themselves."

"Damn it, man, we have no choice," said Hjalmar impatiently.

"I wouldn't know," admitted Correll. "The situation's new to me. However, there's one factor you've overlooked. Our fast-moving 'supermen' aren't the only ones. There's that other group."

"They're of lesser importance," Hjalmar asserted flatly. "They're apparently normal. And normal people we can handle. At this stage there's no need to complicate the problem by worrying about them."

"You don't simplify a problem by making your mind simple," said Correll. "This other group is no more normal than the first one is. I should say that it's composed of individuals who are super-slow."

"Then they're certainly no problem. However, what gives you the impression that they're slow?"

"Certain things that happened, and certain things that were said. Medlana referred to her group's 'weakness.' I think this is it. She said that they had been in existence for some time before the other group, and had anticipated the existence of the latter. The reason for that, obviously, is that their attention had already been drawn to the possibility of changes in the metabolism rate by what had happened to themselves. A man who is missing a finger is the first to realize that men can exist with six fingers. Medlana said also that they had

taken certain measures of precaution. That indicates that she knows things which we don't know, and that her group would be a useful ally in the fight."

Hjalmar shook his massive head. "If they're slow, they're at the same disadvantage with regard to us as we are with regard to the others, and we don't need them. It's true that the information we have indicates that some individuals developed much more slowly than others. But the slow ones could hardly have gotten together effectively. We'll do better in this, Correll, to rely upon our own strength and not upon that of such doubtful allies, if they exist."

Correll said nothing. He disagreed, without being quite sure of how firm his grounds for disagreement were.

"You'll be leaving for Mars in a few more days," went on Hjalmar. "As I told you before, you'll report all this to your superiors. And in case our rapid friends attempt to establish a base on Mars, we'll be ready for them."

Correll understood that the interview was at an end. He rose, and Hjalmar, evidently trying to emulate his new rapid opponents, shook hands with him, and ushered him briskly to the door.

Outside the building Correll once more experienced the unpleasant sensation of knowing that he had no privacy, that Hjalmar's men were keeping an eye on him.

He laughed at the sight of them, but without real amusement. They were a nuisance. And he had already seen enough of them to be sure that they would be no protection whatever if he were attacked by Pappas or any of his group.

HE WAS beginning now to find some sense in what had happened to him. The loss of time which had so baffled him could only be explained by a drug. The human race had long known of drugs which gave the user a sense of expanded time, so that he seemed to live an entire life in the period of half an hour. Suppose, however, that there were a drug

which acted not on the brain alone, but on the entire metabolism, producing neither hallucinations nor nightmares, but fundamental differences in the action of the body, actually slowing it up in every way. And suppose that the drug had been used upon him by Medlana, not merely after her interview with him, but before it. . . .

Then the entire scene would actually have taken place in a sort of slow motion, without his being aware of it. He objected to himself that there had been nothing wrong with his sense of time when he first met her. And, he told himself, she might have compensated for her different metabolism with another drug.

He realized he was only guessing, but, the guess seemed plausible. Now, to speculate a bit further, perhaps not all individuals were affected by the drug in the same way. Suppose, for example, that Arwon, in that first interview, had tried to speed up his own processes so as to meet Correll on equal terms, and had fallen victim to some side effect of the drug he had used. That would explain his collapse. And suppose—

He began to feel a sense of excitement as he realized where his speculations were leading him. Suppose that others of Arwon's group, who had used the drug and then gone out to mingle with ordinary human beings, collapsed likewise, but with none of their own kind near to help them. What would happen to them then? Why, they'd be taken to the nearest hospital in a coma, and be treated for shock or exhaustion, or whatever else the doctors thought was wrong with them.

That was the place to look for them, then—the hospitals. Sooner or later they'd turn up there.

Disregarding the parade of Hjalmar's men trailing behind him, he flagged a taxi-copter, and asked to be taken to the nearest Health Record Center. He noted that three other copters promptly took their places behind him. Probably Commerce Department property that had been kept in reserve, he thought, taking

no chances of his escaping them again.

At the Health Record Center, he found easy access to the lists of hospital admissions. There were relatively few diagnosed cases. These were described in terms of symptoms. Of the thousands of admissions during the past year, there had been no more than a dozen in which the patients had been in a low-temperature coma for no detectable reason. He checked the descriptions of these patients, and noted seven of them were men, all bearded. And beards were distinctly not fashionable.

The clerk said, "Doing research, Mr. Correll?"

"Yes, for the C.D. How up-to-date are your records?"

"Up to the minute. We get the reports by direct wave from the hospitals as soon as the admissions are made and the patients classified. An electronic brain codes and classifies the cases."

"Ever try classifying the patients by whether or not they wear beards?"

"Why, no."

"The system might yield some interesting information."

"But bearded patients are unusual. Strangely enough, now that you mention it, Mr. Correll, I noted that there was one reported early today. But ordinarily we wouldn't have one in weeks."

"There was one today?"

"At the Third General Hospital. Here's the record. Man found in coma."

"Temperature?"

"Ninety-six degrees."

"Very interesting," said Correll. "I think I'll go over and take a look at him." In his eagerness, he almost ran out, slowing down outside so that the men following him mightn't perceive his eagerness. At the hospital, he made at once for the clerk at the entrance desk. "I'm looking for an uncle of mine," he said. "He wears a beard, and sometimes he has fits."

"An uncle of yours? That's strange."

"That I have an uncle?"

"No, but that you aren't the first person to come for him. The patient's broth-

er and niece are already here. If you'll wait a moment—"

Presently a nurse led him to the room where the patient lay unconscious. At the bedside a girl was sitting with what seemed to be an older man, his face lined with age. She smiled charmingly at Correll, and said, "It's a pleasant surprise to see you again, Mr. Correll. You can help us take my uncle home."

As he had expected, it was Mediana. As he had not expected, the older "man's" hand closed over his arm with a grip of iron. A robot's grip.

And then his body seemed to freeze, and the room to whirl around him. When they walked him out, he was like a dead man.

VI

IT WAS impossible to collect his thoughts. He was being raced through the corridors of the hospital, around the bend, and up the stairs. He had a moment of terror when he saw the wall rush at him, and only by a miracle, it seemed to him, did the robot holding him avoid a disastrous collision. People and stairs, light and dark, everything flashed past him with kaleidoscopic speed. For one final moment, as they tossed him into the helicopter on the hospital roof, his heart seemed to miss a beat—except that what happened took place in less time than his heart needed for a beat. He had hardly landed in his seat before they were high in the air, the hospital far behind them.

Slowly, how slowly he himself dreaded to realize, he gathered his wits. They hadn't rushed him through the hospital, and the helicopter itself was moving at only normal speed. It was he himself who had been changed, slowed down. Formerly, when they had done that to him, they had done it gradually, put him in surroundings where he wouldn't suspect. Now, himself moving and thinking at roughly only a tenth of ordinary human speed, he could appreciate the feelings of Mediana and her people,

forced to fight for their right to live in a world that whirled and roared dizzily around them.

He had no time to think of it. As if by magic, they were in a space ship, the door seeming instantly to slide shut behind him with a vicious clang, as if in rage at having missed hitting him. He was conscious of Mediana facing him, and then of images racing confusedly and confusingly across his field of vision, of bursts of crackling sound vaguely resembling human speech that hurt his eardrums.

Suddenly the sounds slowed down, became comprehensible. He was alone with Mediana.

"You'd better sit. Here," she said, in what seemed to him normal tones.

He sat down. But no sooner had he dropped into his seat, with a thud that jarred him to the crown of his head, than he felt a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach, the horrible nausea of rapid acceleration. Darkness flashed in front of his eyes and flooded his brain. A heavy weight pressed his eyelids together. But, to his great relief, only for a second.

He opened his eyes. They were still accelerating, although less rapidly than before. And Mediana was watching him. There was a trace of a wistful smile on her beautiful face as she said, "You're beginning to realize something of what we go through."

His own face was still pale. "It's a horrible experience."

"Because you don't yet know how to adjust to it. You dropped into that seat too rapidly. Next time, when we're on a planet, you'll remember that for you the apparent acceleration of gravity has increased ten times."

"Only when I move, of course."

"You can't help moving. The mere act of standing up straight is a continual falling backward and forward. You'll have to be more careful than usual about every step you take. You'll have to be more careful even about sitting down and getting up."

DOWN below them, the Earth had already dwindled to a small bright globe, hardly larger in appearance than the moon. Suddenly he realized that he had been kidnapped again. Despite all her present solicitude, Mediana hadn't had any misgivings about snatching him from Earth. And he didn't like the way he had been drugged. He snapped at her, "Do you intend to keep me in this condition?"

"For a while. It's rather convenient for us, and it will make time pass more rapidly for you."

"You won't get away with it. You know that, don't you? Hjalmar had men following me—"

She laughed. "I know all about Hjalmar's men. They're still following you."

"Of course they are. And sooner or later they'll catch up with us. They must have wasted time getting a ship."

"They aren't concerned with ships. They're following you on Earth. Or at least they're following a robot made up to look like you."

"A robot? No robot could imitate me."

"One had already done so. Even to the fingerprints and retinal patterns. We didn't, as you may have supposed, substitute other prints and patterns for those on record. We simply impressed on the robot those of your characteristics that were already marked down. Unfortunately, it didn't occur to us that Martians and native Earthmen might behave in slightly different ways, and we learned later that our robot had shown, by a few subtle traits, an Earth origin. Still, there was little harm done at the time. And we rectified our mistake later."

Correll shook his head in bewilderment. "Impossible," he insisted stubbornly. "Those men following me know me too well. A robot couldn't imitate my walk, my speech."

"This robot has been set to do just that. You forget that we had an opportunity to study you, on your first visit to us. We made our adjustments then."

He remained unconvinced. "How

could a robot carry through trade negotiations, as you claim he did in my name?"

"I made no such claim, and he didn't." She smiled at him as if at a slow-witted child. "He faced Hjalmar across the desk, he listened—and he transmitted everything he heard back to our headquarters by ultrashort wave. He replied to Hjalmar the same way."

"I should have realized," Correll admitted. "I suppose, as I told Hjalmar, I'm simply too dull to think of such things."

"It isn't a matter of speed. You haven't lived an outcast life. We have."

There was bitterness in her manner now, and he said, as much on the defensive as if he had been the kidnapper, and not she, "That's no one's fault."

"Fault or not, it's a fact. That's why we were able to take off in this ship so rapidly. We've had experience in rapid getaways."

He stared through a viewplate of transparency metal. Alongside the plate were the words, *Rambler Queen*. The name of the ship he was on, of course. The ship on which he was a helpless, kidnapped victim.

BEHIND them, Earth was now half the apparent size of the moon, part of the continent of one side—he couldn't make out whether it was Asia or Africa—on the other side from the sun, and hence dark making the planet as a whole slightly gibbous. And he noted with excitement that against the dark continent a bright speck flickered. He exclaimed, "There's another ship on the lane behind us. I can see the exhaust."

"I know. We're being followed. We were followed less than five minutes after we took off."

His voice took on a tone of triumph. "So Hjalmar isn't asleep after all."

"He is not very wide awake. But this isn't Hjalmar. It's the others, who want our cargo. The rapid ones, the R group."

"The ones who move a hundred times as fast as you do? What chance do you

think you have against them?"

She seemed amused at his question. But instead of answering directly, she asked a question of her own. "You think we have none?"

"What chance *can* you have?" he demanded. "You were able to make fools of us only so long as we didn't know of your existence. Because of that you were able to organize, and to catch us by surprise again and again. But now all that has changed. Now we know about you, and we're setting up an organization of our own. And it won't be long before we've spotted all your agents, whether they're on Mars or Venus or Earth."

"And what we can do, this R group, as you call it, can do ten times as fast. We're all of us helpless against *them*."

"You think we had better surrender?" she asked ironically. "Look again. They haven't gained on us."

"They've just started to follow."

She shook her head impatiently. "You don't understand in the least. If we dared to travel at top speed, we would go faster than they possibly could. The speed of a ship is determined by its power and its design, not by the agility of the people in it. The *Rambler Queen* is a ship especially built for our purposes. The ship following us is an ordinary passenger vessel, which the R group has managed to steal."

"They may have a few tricks up their sleeves."

"They have tricks," she demurred. "They rely a great deal on tricks. But we have tricks too. And our sleeves are longer." He noted now that there was nothing serene or placid about her. That had been a momentary effect, created by the difference which had existed between them, and which no longer existed. Now she seemed animated, full of a lively, mocking spirit. Still beautiful, of course. He was more conscious of that than ever, as she stared through the transparency metal at their pursuer, and he caught a glimpse of her profile. She was saying, "Our best friends have a surprise or two in store for them. And so

have you."

"What do you intend to do with me?" he asked bluntly.

"That remains to be decided. We can't let you go, because you know too much. We can't kill you, because we don't kill. And besides," she added unexpectedly, and he thought mischievously, "I rather like you. You're a bit stuffy and bureaucratic, but there's something about you—shall I say, a bureaucratic charm?"

She was laughing at him. He said stiffly, "I've never thought of myself as a bureaucrat." And then he added, almost as if surprised at the thought, "But I suppose that bureaucrats usually don't."

She seemed pleased at the remark. "You're learning."

"You're a good teacher. A beautiful one, too."

She laughed again. "Poor Correll! Why waste your compliments on me? Don't you realize that I'm ancient enough to be your great-great-great-great-grandmother? I'm two hundred and two years old, and far beyond your flattery."

IT WAS a startling thought, and he winced at it. "That's abs—no, it isn't," he admitted. "But two hundred years at your pace is no more than twenty-one at ours. Actually," he argued, "you're younger than I am."

"You're a baby, at any age." And now it was something more than mischief that danced in her eyes. Could it be liking—and regret? "Don't you realize that we can have as little in common as if we lived in different solar systems? Ordinarily I'd seem to you a frozen statue, and you'd seem to me to be rushing insanely past me. The only time we'd be on common ground would be when one or the other of us was drugged, as you are now. Wouldn't that be a wonderful basis for love?"

A feeling of dismay overwhelmed him. "There must be something—"

"There's nothing we can do about it. Think what would happen if we were married. You'd age ten times as rapidly

as I would. You'd be bent and doddering while I seemed hardly older." She said, with genuine sadness, "You see, my dear, to you the entire idea is something new. We've faced such problems before. I remember discussing them with Arwon."

A feeling of jealousy stirred within Correll. "You and Arwon are friends?"

"We've known each other for more than a century," she said demurely. "That's why, when he didn't know what to do, he asked my advice. He thought himself in love with an ordinary girl who lived on Mars. What should he do about it?"

"What did you advise him to do?"

"It never came to the point of advice. Fortunately, he himself realized later on that it couldn't possibly work out."

"Did the girl realize?"

"She had no choice. She was a realist. In the month or so that Arwon was making up his mind, she aged a year, and decided to marry some one of her own kind. Arwon came to a similar decision, although sometimes I think he still has regrets. Now, he wants to marry me."

Again Correll felt the pang of jealousy, an irrational pang, because there was no hope for himself. He said harshly, "Arwon is a fool. How could he prefer any one else to you?"

"It is nice of you to say that."

"How about you? How do you feel about him?"

She didn't answer. She was looking through the viewplate again, and now she said softly. "Two more of them, ahead of us. They must think they have us surrounded."

He felt a sudden force that impelled him sideward. For a moment he thought that the ship had struck some obstacle, and then he realized. "We're twisting around, trying to throw them off. But we can't, even though we're accelerating. All we're doing is losing time by taking a twisting course." He said angrily, "The ship in back may not have our potential speed, but it's gaining on us. It won't be long before they're within a hundred miles."

"There's no need to come so close. Our pursuers have weapons which can be fired from more than a thousand miles away. They intend to disable us, shatter the ship, if necessary, and then loot us at leisure."

"How about our own weapons?"

"We have none. We couldn't spare the time devising them."

He was not unaccustomed to danger, but at this news, his throat felt dry. They were as defenseless as a hare pursued by a pack of hounds. "Then we're lost," he said. "We'll never reach Mars."

"I'm afraid not." But she didn't seem afraid.

The bright exhaust of the ship pursuing them was closer now, closer and

THE ADVENTURES OF

IT SMELLS GRAND



TAKE ONE WHIFFI
(FOR THIS YOU'VE YEARNED!)

IT PACKS RIGHT



PACK YOUR PIPE—
NOW YOU HAVE EARNED

THE GEARS OF TIME

larger. Suddenly there came a brilliant flash beside which the steady glow of the exhaust paled. "They've fired."

How many seconds before the missile struck? One, two—

THERE came a dull, barely perceptible push against the side of the ship. There was no explosion. The ship spun around slowly and continued its flight.

He said, "It took two seconds for the missile to overtake us. That was fast."

"Twenty seconds. You forget that you are now living and counting at a slower rate."

"Why didn't it explode?"

"Because it didn't make strong enough contact. It glanced off. The surface of our ship has perfect slipperiness."

"Like the ground outside that house from which the robots released us?"

She nodded. "We first developed frictionless surfaces for use on space ships in order to cut down on the resistance of the air, and to avoid overheating the skin of the ship in a planet's atmosphere. We've also found them useful in avoiding dangers of meteors in space."

"Suppose they use projectiles which you don't have to make contact in order to explode? Suppose they can be set off merely by the proximity of the target—by radiated heat, for example? I've heard of such weapons being used in the past, centuries ago."

"So have I." The suggestion made her look pale, pale and not so sure of herself. "But I think that we're capable of handling them."

"You think or you hope?"

"I—I think."

The ship had long since departed from the straight course it had previously pursued. Now it was curving toward one side, trying to escape from the pursuers who were attempting to hem it in from different directions. Another bright exhaust was for the moment obliterated by the glare of a firing flash. Another missile was coming at them.

He took a deep breath and began to count again. One, two—

The ship exploded. Correll put his hands to his eyes to shield them from the blinding glare of a nearby sun. The ship had exploded, it should be in fragments, he should be dead. Instead the ship was rocketing on its way as before, apparently undamaged.

There was another explosion, another dazzling burst of radiation. His eyes, caught by surprise, were for a moment unable to focus clearly on anything. As they slowly regained their ability to see, he realized that the ship was bathed in a faint green-yellow glow strong enough to blot out the gleaming stars in every direction. And as they hurtled through space, the glittering cloud raced along with them.

[Turn page]

UNCLE WALTER

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SIR WALTER RALEIGH'S BLEND OF CHOICE KENTUCKY BURLER'S IS EXTRA-AGED TO GUARD AGAINST TONGUE BITE, AND SIR WALTER RALEIGH NEVER LEAVES A SOGGY HEEL IN YOUR PIPE. STAYS LIT TO THE LAST PUFF.



*It costs
no more
to get
the best!*

He saw Medlana release her breath slowly, as if glad to escape from unbearable tension. She said quietly, "We've passed the test."

"How? Were those actually heat-proximity shells?"

"They must have been. If they had been magnetic proximity, or electric proximity, it might have been more difficult. Fortunately for us, our rapid friends could not move rapidly enough to develop more than one type."

He said thoughtfully, "Then this green-yellow glow must be a hot cloud emitted by the ship itself."

"Yes, it's a slightly ionized cloud. It fluoresces by intercepting the heat radiation from the ship and reradiating in a sphere a mile away from the surface of the ship itself. The nuclear missiles are set off before they can approach close enough to do real damage, and the walls of the ship, including the transparency metal, intercept the dangerous particles and rays."

"Why does the cloud travel with us?"

"For one reason, because it has the same forward momentum as the ship itself. For another, because the slight magnetism of the ship's hull is sufficient to attract the ionized particles. They'll break away in time, but not until after we've left our pursuers behind us."

He said slowly, "I must admit that it's a clever device. Do you have crewmen moving at normal speed on board, to control it?"

MEDLANA seemed surprised. "Of course not. We use robots. The reactions that would ordinarily require tenths of a second with normal men like you, and hundredths of a second with our enemies, take place in a millionth of a second or less in the electronic brains that control our robots. They're far more rapid than any human controls. That's one of the reasons that we need not fear our enemies."

"And the other reasons?"

"Isn't it obvious? They use up their supplies of food and air at ten times

the rate we do. One of their ships is incapable of reaching even as far as Mars, until it has a normal human crew aboard, and only one or two of the R group to control them. Otherwise its rate of food and air consumption would be too great. And those fighting ships of theirs obviously have more than one or two R men aboard."

"Which means that they'll have to be turning back very soon, while we keep on to Mars."

"I didn't say that Mars was our destination," she observed quietly.

He was startled. "Not Mars? But where then?"

She shrugged. "You'll learn soon enough. Now I think I'll leave you. I must make a report."

He barred the way. He said, "I've been a fool."

"Undoubtedly," she agreed.

"Once before we were in a situation similar to this. You registered us as husband and wife. And I didn't even have the sense to kiss you good-by when you left."

Her enigmatic expression told him nothing. She said merely, "I think I overlooked the point in my previous report to my superiors."

"Well, I don't make the same mistake twice, and you can put this in your new report." He was definitely not slow, and the next moment his arms were around her.

She made no attempt to resist. Instead, he felt her arms tighten around him. He didn't know how many seconds later it was that a harsh voice broke in on them. "Medlana!"

He looked up. The bearded features of Arwon reproached them from the doorway, and the tangle of beard was surmounted by eyes that glittered hatefully. There was no enigmatic expression here, thought Correll. This time those eyes were flaming with an angry fever whose origin he could not mistake.

Medlana stepped slowly away from him, her face as enigmatic as before, as she murmured, "I am sorry, Arwon."

I have been—unavoidably—detained.”

She followed him through the doorway, and Correll thought that for just a moment there was the faint twitch of a smile at the corner of the lips he had just kissed.

The green-yellow cloud was losing its glow, becoming pale and attenuated. Now he could see the stars through it, the glittering pinpoints of light racing along past the viewplate as the ship rocketed on. But gradually he became aware that the stars were losing their speed. Slower and slower became their motion, until at last they seemed to be crawling past at almost a snail's pace.

At first he thought that the ship was decelerating. Then he realized that the effects of the drug had worn off. He was reacting normally now, and the world no longer rushed by him at so headlong a pace.

But with Medlana, he knew, time moved as slowly as before.

VII

FOR a few moments he thought that they were going to land not on Mars itself, but on one of the tiny, swiftly circling satellites, Phobos or Deimos. But they were bypassing Mars and its satellites altogether. They were fifty million miles away, far off to the side, when he caught sight through the viewplate of the planet he called, “Home,” a brilliant pink-smeared disk with one edge in darkness. But he had no time to contemplate it with a homesickness such as he had never before felt. A speaker from the front wall blared politely, “Mr. Correll is wanted in the Captain's cabin. Please come at once, Mr. Correll.”

The Captain was another bearded man, about the same age as Arwon, but taller, and of even heavier build. He was standing, with Medlana and Arwon, at the telescreen, on which there appeared the figure of an announcer. The announcer was saying, “Fugitive ship, *Rambler Queen*, fugitive ship, *Rambler Queen*. You are hereby ordered to head

for nearest port and surrender yourself to answer charge of violation of terrestrial laws, under penalty of being declared outlaw. Head for nearest port and surrender. Charged with leaving port without clearance license, and also with kidnapping of one Alvo Correll.”

“They've been sending out the message every fifteen minutes,” observed the Captain.

“Then you haven't called me here just to listen to it?”

“No,” replied Medlana, who had been standing nearby. “But they've announced that there's a message coming from Hjalmar too. It might be of some concern to you.”

The announcer repeated his message once more, and then disappeared. The huge bulky figure of Hjalmar took over the screen.

He looked tired and worried. He began slowly. “To the Captain and the crew of the *Rambler Queen*. So far you have not replied to our order to surrender. If you are keeping silence in order to keep from giving away your position, you will be well advised to know that we are aware of your position anyway. Be informed that your path is cut off, and that you will not escape.

“That is point one. Point two is that we have a supply of nuclear bombs, and that we intend to use them rather than allow you to carry out your illegal plans. We do this reluctantly, but your own actions have forced us to take this step.”

“They always do it reluctantly,” said Medlana bitterly, as he paused. “The kind father punishing his unruly children against his will.”

Hjalmar went on. Medlana, and the Captain, and Arwon must all be under the influence of the accelerating drug, thought Correll, or else they wouldn't have seemed to react normally, to understand what the image of Hjalmar said.

Hjalmar spoke sternly. “This is a message to Mr. Correll, in case he has not been kidnapped, and has boarded the *Rambler Queen* voluntarily, under the impression that he was helping a

persecuted minority. I warn you, Correll, that you will not be able to escape. Explain to them what great organizational strides we have made, and persuade them to surrender before harm comes to them." The voice grew threatening. "Otherwise, destruction awaits all of you."

CORRELL said thoughtfully, "He doesn't know for sure whether I'm an innocent victim of yours or not, but he's willing to destroy me along with you to make sure that you don't get away. That doesn't seem like Hjalmar. He must be genuinely afraid of you. Or else—" he hesitated.

The others waited, but Correll didn't go on, and for a time Hjalmar's voice continued, this time coaxingly. Finally, Hjalmar disappeared from the screen, and the announcer came on again.

They turned off the screen. Medlana said, "I wonder whether it's worth answering him, and pointing out that nuclear destruction is hardly a fitting punishment for the harmless alleged crimes we've committed."

The Captain shook his head. "You can't argue with a man who's more than ten minutes away by light signal. There's too great an interval between statement and reply. Besides, if we answer, we're liable to fall into the trap of giving away our position, which they may not know, despite their claims."

"Exactly," agreed Arwon. "We must go our way, and prepare for another nuclear missile attack."

"No." Correll shook his head. "There won't be another nuclear attack, at least not like the other."

They looked at him inquiringly.

"In the first place, as I said, it's not like Hjalmar to threaten mass destruction. He is not a murderous man. And even if he were, he wouldn't be able to send us to our deaths. He would have no right to give the orders, and his orders would not be carried out."

"We can't be sure of that," objected Arwon.

"In the second place, the government has no nuclear bombs handy. Hjalmar assured me that no weapons had been made by the government for centuries, and although there is plenty of nuclear fuel available, I think that there are no technicians capable of making a careful and at the same time rapid assembly of several complicated bombs without blowing themselves up in the process."

"Then you think that Hjalmar was bluffing?" demanded Medlana.

"Not bluffing completely. Merely misdirecting us. He is probably planning other methods of stopping us."

"For example," said Arwon.

"I can't read Hjalmar's mind, but I can think of one method. When my ship from Mars was wrecked and helpless, we were picked up by a vessel with a salvage beam. At first this was a broad beam used for scanning a large area. Once we were located, however, the beam was narrowed, its wave length being altered at the same time. The narrow beam was kept on us until the rescue ship made direct contact. I think that very narrow, extremely concentrated beams of the same sort are used in guiding ships into port. Is that right, Captain?"

The Captain nodded. "They are."

"How variable is the wave length?"

"Past very hard x-ray frequency. Through the soft gamma rays."

"Would they penetrate the ship's hull in great strength?"

"They might if they were powerful enough," replied the Captain cautiously.

"And set off the ship's nuclear fuel?" demanded Medlana. "Those bomb explosions didn't."

"The bomb explosions scattered their energy from a center a mile from the ship," explained the Captain. "If this were a sufficiently powerful and sufficiently concentrated beam, there's a possibility that it would touch off an explosion. Of course it would be a soft explosion, in view of the kind of fuel we use, and it wouldn't wreck the ship. But it would stop us in our course and leave

us helpless."

"What defense do we have against an attack of that sort?" asked Correll.

"None that I know of," said the Captain worriedly. "We'll have to think of one."

"No use worrying about it too much," asserted Arwon. "We may not be intercepted at all." He frowned. "I have something to say to you, Correll. Something personal."

The others stared at him in surprise. Correll demanded, "What's wrong? Haven't I behaved as properly as a kidnapped prisoner should?"

ARWON flushed above his beard, and there was the beginning of a smile on Medlana's lips. The Captain looked puzzled, but so far as Correll could penetrate behind the hairy screen that concealed his broad face, interested as well. Arwon replied stiffly, "We'll discuss that in private, if you please."

He led the way out, and Correll followed. In a small room off the ship's main passageway, Arwon came to a halt. He began, ponderously and pugnaciously, "Correll, it may not have occurred to you that we—the members of the long-lived group, that is—are a race apart."

"It has occurred to me. I can't say that I believe it, though."

"It is true. We live to some extent among ordinary Martians and Terrans, but we are not of them. We cannot share their trivial joys and pleasures, their habits, or their manner of existence. Or their morals."

"So that's what you're driving at. Their morals. Or rather, my morals."

"Yes. We are a dedicated group, and we cannot tolerate your trifling attitude toward the serious things of life."

"In other and less lofty words, you're jealous."

"Do not twist my words. This is not a personal matter at all. It is merely that although we have been forced to take you aboard this ship—"

"Forced?"

Arwon disregarded the interruption.

"We do not intend to let your own lax standards become ours. There are both men and women in our crew, and they have always behaved sanely and respectably. They intend to continue to behave in that manner. They—we do not intend to let you drag us down to your level."

"This is a very serious matter indeed," said Correll, his amused eyes fixed on Arwon's angry face. "I'm surprised that you wanted to speak to me personally about it. You should have taken the whole problem up with the Captain and Medlana."

"It can be handled between us."

"I suppose it can. But don't you think you had better be careful? You might get excited and lose control of yourself, as on that first occasion when we met—"

"I did not lose control of myself," replied Arwon coldly. "But I had been under the influence of the drug for a lengthy period, and its toxic effects are cumulative. I was very near my limit of tolerance."

"Well, you don't seem very normal to me now. I don't see how one man can corrupt the morals of a ship unless he has a partner in corruption. Do you think that I have one?"

Hatred gleamed in the prophet's eyes. "Medlana and I are engaged to be married. And that is not something to be taken lightly."

"I didn't know. Do you both agree that you're going to be married, or is the whole thing your idea?"

"Don't try to turn a serious matter into a subject for ridicule," glowered Arwon. "You are in our hands, at our mercy."

"You look like a prophet, Arwon, but you don't talk like one. Prophets don't think of getting married. The idea excites them, and they lose their ability to foretell the future."

"You talk like a fool, Correll. And although I cannot ordinarily foretell the future, I can tell what will happen to you if you continue in this vein."

"That's interesting. By the way, there's something I'd like to ask you.

Why do you wear that beard? For the sake of the dignified appearance it makes, or is there some more important reason?"

Arwon seemed aghast at the triviality and the irrelevance of the question. He stammered, "We—we all wear beards, all the men, as you can see. And it's stupid to think that we do it for the sake of appearance. It's simply that although our average metabolism is one-tenth your own, our beards grow about as rapidly as yours do."

"And as it would take you ten times as long to shave, and you'd have to shave just as frequently, it's simpler to let the thing grow. I should have known. Thank you, Arwon, that will do."

Arwon was already walking away, when it seemed to occur to him that he should have been the one to bring the interview to an end, and not Correll. He turned and glowered again, but said nothing, and then disappeared down the corridor.

Correll smiled to himself. It was true, as Medlana had told him, that he himself had possessed a tendency to be stuffy. And there was nothing to bring that fact home to him like the contact with a stuffiness that surpassed his own, a stuffiness for which he had no respect.

Well, the habits that had made for stuffiness no longer existed on this ship, so far as he was concerned. He had no duties, no difficult and serious labor that kept him busy hour after hour. He had nothing to do but amuse himself and kill time. And think of Medlana. That, certainly, didn't make for a stuffy attitude. If anything, it made for frustration and despair.

IT WAS on the Mars orbit, twenty million miles from the once red planet itself, that trouble caught up with them. Mars, its surface glowing pink now that almost all the oxygen had been released by ferriphilic bacteria from the great deposits of red rust and its atmosphere had become almost as dense as that of Earth, seemed so close that Correll al-

most felt like taking off in a lifeboat and trying to reach home. Two things restrained him—his reluctance to leave Medlana, and the fact that Hjalmar's ships were preparing to attack.

The *Rambler Queen* was an outlaw, and could expect no mercy. Correll felt the excitement mount as the entire vessel tensed in readiness for the expected attack. The ship's detectors had spotted a dozen government craft. There was little choice but to continue straight ahead. There was no time to turn around, and if they attempted to veer so much as one degree toward one side or the other, they would only come closer to several of the intercepting ships. There was no way of avoiding a showdown.

Correll had been drugged with the retarding drug ahead of time, almost as if they wanted to take no chances of his trying to betray them to Hjalmar's men. Once more, time speeded up for him as the ship raced into danger. The Captain and the engineers, who might have to face the need of emergency action that the robots could not handle, could move at normal speed. They knew that whatever his intentions he would be helpless against them, and he was therefore permitted the freedom of the navigation room, where he and Medlana were able, by instrument, to follow all that happened.

Correll's guess about the means that Hjalmar would employ turned out to be correct. They were picked up at almost the same time by broad beams from two of the ships. One ship was forty-five hundred miles away, the other four thousand. Both beams were diffuse and of long wave-length, with so little penetrating power that they were harmless. But both were guides to the more dangerous beams to follow. At thirty-eight hundred miles they were picked up by a third beam.

"What is our plan?" he demanded. "Why head straight into danger?"

"We have no choice," said Medlana. A sudden change of direction threw them

against a wall. "We're zigzagging, trying to lose the beams, but I don't think we can."

"Then we might as well surrender."

"Not yet," she murmured tensely.

The intercepting ships had been cruising slowly, awaiting their coming. Now they continued to turn as the *Rambler Queen*, traveling slowly in the same direction as they themselves, rushed toward them. They were waiting for her to come close enough for them to pounce upon her. To Correll, in his slowed-down condition, it seemed that hardly twenty seconds had passed from the time the first beams enveloped them to the time when the attack finally came.

The beams had narrowed rapidly and become more concentrated, more powerful. Another few seconds, and they would probe for the *Rambler Queen's* nuclear fuel, explode it to a hot and dangerous radioactive mass.

A needle-like beam shot out of one of the *Rambler Queen's* movable forward jets. It caught the closest government ship amidships, sliced down toward the stern, and crisscrossed back and forth. The ship's hull suddenly puffed out, and the ship went into a twisted spin, stern over stern. The deadly needle sought another ship, and still another.

FIVE seconds later, as Correll now counted time, they had broken through the blockade. Half a dozen ships wallowed helpless behind their own vessel, fuel supplies destroyed, while the other half-dozen pursued them half-heartedly for a few thousand miles, and then, conscious of the need to rescue their fellows, and aware of the danger to themselves, gave up the pursuit and turned back.

Correll shook his head. "They never expected that you'd dare attack a government ship."

"That was our great advantage, our secret weapon."

The Captain came into the room, his bearded features grinning. He seemed to move somewhat rapidly, but now that

the danger was over there was no need of the accelerating drug, and he was rapidly returning to normal. "We went them one better," he chuckled. "We not only took them by surprise, but we had a better, more penetrating beam than they did. Theirs used energy from the nuclear reactors. That's standard for radiation apparatus on government ships. Our own beam had higher frequency rays, with more energy, and with longer range, because we fortified them with vitamins. Cosmic vitamins, or cosmic ray concentrates." He caught Correll's look of surprise. "Yes, my young friend, we learned long ago how to put cosmic rays to some use, which is more than the government ever did."

"Are we likely to be intercepted again?" asked Correll.

"I doubt it. Government ships don't usually patrol further than this. I think we have a clear path to Ganymede."

So that was where they were going. To Ganymede, moon of Jupiter. He recalled what the history books recorded—that exploring parties had reached Ganymede as much as two hundred years back, but had been unable to establish colonies on the cold, bleak satellite, and had almost perished before succeeding in making their return to Mars. If these people had been able to accomplish what the government, with all its resources, had not, they were much more capable than he had realized. Still, he told himself, they had certain advantages. They had possessed above all the great advantage of organization for a single purpose, to maintain their own existence. With the government unsuspecting, they had been able to make away unhampered with considerable materiel, and to utilize the discoveries of the government's own research laboratories for their own purposes.

But now the government knew about them. In a short time, under the energetic direction of Hjalmar, it would be preparing a fleet, which it would furnish with special weapons, and send out as an expeditionary force. Sooner or later, its

forces would overwhelm this group, as well as any other group that dared to organize against it. Even the so-called Supermen, with their special powers, would not long be able to hold out against it.

He said as much to Medlana, and was not surprised to find her dissenting vigorously. "We can defend ourselves," she asserted firmly. "We have been forced to learn how."

"You're trying to do the impossible. You not only have the disadvantage, when you're not drugged, of being so much slower. You're even outnumbered, with incredibly high odds against you. You can't possibly have more than a few thousand in your colonies on Ganymede, while Earth and Mars and Venus together have a population of ten billion."

"You don't know how to calculate odds," she retorted, her eyes flashing. "We are willing to fight for our side. But are those ten billion that you talk about so glibly willing to sacrifice themselves for no good reason, to kill people who have never harmed them?"

"They don't believe that you've never harmed them. Or they won't when they learn about you. To them you'll seem dangerous, hostile—"

MEDLANA laughed shortly. "We organized not because we were dangerous, but because we were in danger. In the early days, the different individuals of our group developed so slowly that they were mistaken for feeble-minded and put into institutions. That had one fortunate result, for most of the institutions were understaffed, and my people were able to develop without too much interference, and eventually to get together in their own defense. It wasn't easy in those days, but once a start was made, there was no trouble at all in carrying on."

Correll thought of the difficulty these slow-moving people must have had in seeking each other out, making plans, carrying them out. That they had ever been able to organize at all now seemed

to him like a miracle.

Medlana went on. "After a time, moreover, we began to learn the advantages we had. One of our decades encompassed five of your ordinary generations. Things happened so rapidly in front of our eyes that we couldn't forget the lessons they taught us. We couldn't help developing a long-range view. For instance, we saw that we were only extreme cases of variations in ordinary human beings. Ordinary people not only live for different lengths of time, they live at different rates. By your own standards, some people race fiercely through life, and are burnt out in a brief period, and others just plod through it. We soon found that even within the limits of our own small group, the rate of living varied. Some of us moved at one-ninth the ordinary rate of speed, others at one-eleventh. Under the influence of the accelerating drug, taken in a definite amount, under standard conditions, some of us move at what you would consider normal speed, others even more rapidly than normal."

"What good did it do you to know that?"

"We developed what you might call a sense of history. We began to trace developments and extrapolate them into the future. In a way then, you might say that some of us are prophets. If some people could move more rapidly than normal, we realized that eventually individuals were sure to be produced who would be as extremely developed in that direction as we were in the opposite direction. We foresaw the coming into being of the R group, your so-called "Supermen." We knew that we wouldn't be able to stop them from organizing—nor did we want to do so. We were far too busy protecting ourselves. But we could take steps to prevent them from harming us greatly."

"Nevertheless, sooner or later, you'll be helpless before them."

She said impatiently, "You don't understand their weakness. Paradoxically, it lies in their strength—in their being

so much faster, and therefore apparently so much superior to the normal. People used to regard us as feeble minded because of our slowness, they used to have contempt for us. But your government never had contempt for the R group. It feared them, and it still does. It fears the speed at which they act, the speed at which they can multiply. It can't leave their colonies alone, for fear they'll increase. It *must* take steps against them before it moves seriously against us."

"Nevertheless, if the R group also moves against you—"

"We have had few clashes, and those few mainly in struggles over material which we were both attempting to obtain from the government."

"A better word would be, 'steal.'"

"For them perhaps, but not for us. We always offered value in exchange. But that is beside the point. The fact is, as you know, that they haven't won all those struggles, not by any means."

"The long-range view which our slowness has forced on us, they find impossible to acquire. They live through ten of their generations in one of yours, in a tenth of ours. They learn to live for the moment, counting on their speed and their ability to increase rapidly to keep them safe."

"Because of this overconfidence in their own abilities, they themselves have done comparatively little research, except on rapid-growing food, as you saw when you were held prisoner by them. They count instead on kidnapping scientists, and inducing their victims to work for them. And scientists, like most other people, don't work their best in captivity."

"Because of their high opinion of themselves, they've never developed useful robots. Naturally, the first robots of any type tend to be crude and full of faults. Our own robots were bad enough. But they moved rapidly compared to us—and this advantage was important enough for us to spend time and energy on them, and develop them to their pres-

ent state. The R group felt so superior to any robots that they neglected them."

"All the same, the one advantage that they can multiply rapidly is impossible for you to overcome."

"You're incorrigible," she told him. "Don't you realize that robots too can multiply themselves rapidly? Even more rapidly; We're setting up a new robot factory right now. When it's complete, our robot population will grow by leaps and bounds. It will remake Ganymede, and leave us invulnerable to any attack that is likely to be launched against us."

SHE had built up a picture of her group as unconquerable because of its very weakness, and despite himself, Correll felt impressed. He agreed, at least, that her people would be difficult to conquer. But it was with mixed feelings that he viewed that fact. "According to Arwon," he said thoughtfully, "you are an elect group, superior in morals and other high qualities to common humans."

"Don't take Arwon too seriously. Some of us feel that way because oppression has forced us to have a low opinion of the average human being. But that feeling will pass once we've built up our base on Ganymede. Arwon, especially, seems to regard himself as a patriarch. But he has reason for doing so. After all, he's nearly three hundred years old."

"Not so much older than you."

"No," she laughed. "Still, I don't feel like a patriarch. Nor a matriarch, for that matter. In fact—"

He came closer. "In fact, I can't get myself to think of you as old enough to be my many-times-great-grandmother!"

"Have you tried?"

"Often. The trouble is that you don't look the part."

"Tell me how I look," she said dreamily. "The unfortunate part about having a lofty moral attitude, such as Arwon has, is that you never tell a girl the things she would like to hear. And even an ancient, many-times-great-grandmother occasionally resents not being flattered."

"I shall try to remedy that deficiency," came a harsh voice. Correll looked up startled, to see Arwon in the doorway. He had forgotten that he and Medlana were not alone in the ship. "At present, Medlana," went on the intruder, "the Captain wants to discuss with you the report you're to make to the Council on landing."

She smiled at him, saying, "Thank you for coming in person to tell me about it, Arwon. Will you please entertain Mr. Correll while I'm gone. Give him a little of the benefit of your superior wisdom."

She slipped out, leaving the two men staring at each other in embarrassed hostility. Arwon cleared his throat, and it occurred to Correll that the man was making a special effort to be cordial. He might have been stuffy, but there was nothing villainous about him. And the one thing you couldn't blame a man for, thought Correll, was showing jealousy when it seemed to him that some one else was trying to take away his girl.

Only, he reminded himself, Medlana hadn't said that she was his girl.

Arwon said heavily, "Do you play chess, Correll?"

"Chess? I've never had time to learn the game."

"We do not usually play games," the other admitted. "But chess has come down through history as an important means for the development of a feeling for strategy. And as we have been forced to fight continually against great odds, it has acquired a certain popularity among us."

"Of course," said Correll. "It wouldn't hurt me to know strategy too. I'll be glad to learn it. Unless you have something more important for me to do until we land."

"There is nothing else for you to do. But let me explain about the game. It is played both mentally and with a board and pieces. As a beginner, you had better start with the board and pieces. Here, there is a set in this cupboard. This is how you arrange the men."

Correll watched and listened.

"This piece is the king. This is a bishop, this a knight."

Only once did he ask a question. "Are you allowed to sweep any of the pieces off the board with your beard?"

"No," snapped Arwon.

"Then I won't bother to grow one."

Arwon looked at him sharply, and went on explaining. When Correll thought he had the idea, they began a game.

The effect of the decelerating drug had been gradually wearing off Correll. Now it was gone entirely. Between one move of the slow-moving Arwon's and the next there was at least half an hour.

The difference in metabolism put him at a strategic disadvantage, thought Correll. No man could wait that long and keep his attention on the game. In the same way, the difference in metabolism gave Arwon an advantage with Medlana. Correll thought about her while he waited for his opponent to make the next move, but the only conclusion to which he could come was that he had better put her out of his mind. And that was a conclusion which he would not accept.

He lost the game, of course. But there were always ways of snatching victory from defeat, and this time he found one of those ways. During the nine hours that the game lasted, he had a fine nap, waking up only when he had to make a move, and doing that while only half conscious.

He was losing again a few days later when the ship spiraled down to make a landing on Ganymede. During the interval, he had reached the conclusion that despite all the appearance of attempt at cordiality, Arwon liked him no better than before.

Then they landed, and in the excitement of the new world, he forgot his bearded rival.

IX

THE atmosphere was chill and thin, but breathable, not much worse than that of his native Mars. But Ganymede,

at least that part of it that he could see, was not in the least like Mars. Beyond the built-up spaceport at which they had landed, he could see range after range of hills stretching into the distance, rough and jagged as those of Earth's Moon. No smooth stretches of flat land broken up by canals or by the endless modern villages that dotted the once red planet's surface.

Here was only a rocky desert, a mountainous silicate wilderness where men penetrated only with the greatest of caution. The sun was cold and shrunken, giving only a tenth the heat and light that it gave to Mars, a little more than a



thirtieth of what it so freely offered Earth. And the frosty air, thin as it was, whipped him like an icy lash.

Up above, blotting out a great portion of the half dark sky, sailed the tremendous bulk of Jupiter, its enormous disk bulging at the equator as if some galactic giant had brought his fists down upon its poles and squashed them together.

It was hard to take his eyes from the fantastically huge mass in the sky, hard to shake off the feeling that out of sheer evil spite that tremendous bulk might suddenly decide to drop down upon them and blot out the puny creatures who

dared to infest the surface of its satellite. He forced himself to shake the ominous feeling off. This was the interplanetary age, when superstition was dead. The age when an understanding of science was as natural as an understanding of how to breathe. People no longer had a right to experience such fears.

He stood near the ship from which he had descended, waiting for Medlana to receive certain final instructions and join him. When Medlana finally appeared, she moved at a pace that exceeded his own. She had evidently made use of the accelerating drug.

"You've been looking around?"

"Around, and up. I've been trying to see everything at once, but there's too much to take in. Are you sure that Jupiter isn't going to fall down on us?"

She laughed at him. "I'm sure it won't, but I don't blame you for wondering. We all feel the same way when we first come here. Especially when it rises in a dim light from over those mountains, and it seems to be racing directly at us. But it hasn't fallen yet."

"Will you guide me through the city? Or is no guide necessary?"

"You had better not go alone. The fact that you don't have a beard will give you away, and you might receive some unwelcome automatic attention from some of the robots."

It was his turn to laugh. "So they can be fooled by beards."

"Not so easily as you think. The beard must be of the right texture, the proper chemical composition, and so on. It can't be readily faked."

She shivered slightly, and he said, "It is cold."

"We have some radiant heat from the ground beneath, but in my present state of acceleration, it isn't enough. And I find it hard to breathe. Wait here, and I'll get some insulated clothes for both of us."

She went into a small building not far from the ship, and in a few moments she returned with modified spacesuits

for both of them. They were not air tight, Correll noted, but they were easier to put on than regulation space clothes, and sufficiently warm to keep out the chill of Ganymede's air, and they contained small light oxygen tanks and breathing masks.

He thanked her, and said, "Under ordinary conditions, I take it, you don't mind the low temperature and the low oxygen content."

"Not at all. In our unaccelerated condition, we're well adapted to life here." She asked, "Would you want to ride through the city, or walk?"

"Walk, of course. I haven't had a chance to stretch my legs since—"

"Since you tracked me down at that hospital."

"Yes, it seems a century ago, by your standards or mine. At any rate, I'll walk. The gravity here is so low that there's little effort involved."

THEY set off toward the city. On the one side of the spaceport, the sharp, threatening mountains, on the other the single city, to call it by a flattering name, that had been built on Ganymede. The layout was as simple as that.

There were no tall buildings, no carefully landscaped streets and squares and plots of grass. There had been no time for that. The buildings were low, evidently constructed of rapid-setting plastic. They stretched in every direction, and came to an abrupt end little more than half a mile away from the spaceport. Where they ended, once more the sharp rocky hills began, rising higher and higher as they faded into the distance.

"Not a sight to please an artist or architect," admitted Medlana. "We were working under pressure when we built the town. But the houses are comfortable within. And we intend to make a great many improvements later, once we have our automatic robot factory working efficiently."

As they approached the rows of buildings, Correll became aware of the people.

They were all unaccelerated. Men and women both, they moved, in ordinary light clothes, at the same slow pace as the others of their kind, falling forward like frozen statues which had been thawed out so slightly that they were not yet sure they were alive. On Earth such motion had seemed outlandish, pathological. Here, in the cold dim daylight and the weak gravity of Ganymede, it seemed somehow natural. In such gray surroundings, these people were at home. It was he himself, with his jarringly rapid gait and speech, who was unnatural and out of place.

He saw only one or two robots. They caught sight of him before he noticed them, and he observed that they turned to him to scan him rapidly, before they moved on. Medlana gave them a sign that there was nothing wrong, and they disappeared into the low buildings.

"You can understand now why Ganymede hasn't been colonized by ordinary human beings," she said.

HE NODDED. "We'd have to spend so much time bringing in supplies to fight the cold and the dark that we wouldn't have much time to get a great deal of work done." He stared at the modified spacesuit he wore. "This isn't bad, but it's a clumsy outfit to work in."

"We're adapted to life on cold, dark worlds, just as the R group is adapted to life on hot, well-lighted worlds. That's why I think they've established their main base on Venus. But they've been content to take Venus as they found it. We're not so complacent. We have no intention of leaving Ganymede as we found it. We knew very definitely what changes we intend to make."

"For one thing, we're going to build solar reflectors that will help us to use some of the sunlight, weak as it is, that is now going to waste. That will increase our energy reserves. Moreover, the air is too thin, even for many of our purposes, so we intend to introduce some of those ferriphilic bacteria that your own people have used so effectively on

Mars, to release the oxygen from the iron rust in the soil, and raise the oxygen content slightly. We're going to spread the use of specially acclimated food plants."

"You have it all planned," said Correll, with almost grudging respect. "And I suppose that you'll soon be starting to mine for metals—"

"Soon? We began long ago, on the very day we set up our first buildings. Where do you suppose we obtained those ores we wanted to exchange with you for supplies, if not here? We've found minerals that Earth and Mars have never seen."

"As I'm willing to agree, you've done well, and you have great plans. But what makes you think that your plans will be permitted to be carried out?"

"I'd like to know what would stop us!" she flared.

"The governments of Earth and Mars and Venus, for one thing, the governments of ordinary people who see in you a threat, unjustified if you will, but none the less a threat to their own existence. Pappas and his R group for another thing, because they regard themselves as superior and you as freaks who happen to stand in their way."

"We've gone through all that before," she said curtly.

"Often enough. I'm still unconvinced."

"How do you imagine that the R group will get here, across more than four hundred million miles of space? They use food and air at a hundred times our rate."

"They're no more stupid than you are," persisted Correll. "They'll grow food on their ships—fast-growing vegetables, plus algae for protein. They'll recirculate the air more rapidly. It will mean a slightly greater expenditure of reserve fuel, but they'll manage. Sooner or later, they'll manage."

"Let us assume that they can get here. What then?" she demanded. "Can you see them living at this low temperature? Wherever they go, their food and air

problems go with them. And on a satellite as large as this is, those problems can't be solved as simply as on a ship of limited size. No, you have unnecessary fears. They'll never—"

A man ran out of one of the low houses. He was bearded, like all the other men except Correll, but he ran as no man had ever before run on Ganymede. He streaked through the streets, threading his way through the almost motionless statues, at a pace that dazzled Correll's eyes. Behind him, attracted by his very speed, came two robots.

The man reached the end of the row of houses without stopping. He sped up the side of a hill and disappeared over its top. The robots followed.

Medlana's face was pale as she and Correll exchanged glances. Correll repeated ironically, "Never?"

"We don't know what happened yet," she replied.

THERE was a short, agonizing wait. Arwon and the Captain, along with two other sober-looking men, came toward them, all at a rapid pace. They must have heard what had happened, thought Correll, and must be anxious to find out more, else they would not all have used the accelerating drug.

Arwon said, "The robots reported as they followed. He cannot escape."

The robots reappeared over a hilltop. One of them was carrying the body of the man who had run. Correll and the others moved toward the robots.

As they approached, the robot carrying the body spoke. His voice was incongruously high, a piercing tenor that was almost feminine. The pitch had been adjusted, thought Correll, for maximum carrying power and clarity. The robot said, "We did not stop him. He came to a stop himself. He fell."

The man was not dead, but unconscious. Correll could see the rapid rise and fall of his chest as his lungs sought to devour more of the thin insubstantial air of Ganymede.

The Captain had turned pale at sight

of him. "One of our crew members," he muttered. Correll wondered how he could tell one bearded crewman from another. Probably just a matter of practice. "I could have sworn he was one of ours. I had no suspicion."

"He didn't eat or breathe more rapidly than normal?" asked Medlana.

"I didn't notice anything of the kind. I remember that I used him for special emergency jobs—in fact, he volunteered."

"He made no attempts at sabotage?" demanded Arwon.

"None. He did everything as he should."

"Emergency jobs are handled under the action of the accelerating drug," pointed out Medlana. "That made his attempt at masquerade easier."

The Captain nodded. "And once he was under the action of the drug it was difficult to tell exactly how rapidly he was moving. Unless we had timed him, we couldn't be sure whether it was ten or twenty times our normal rate, or even faster."

One of the other men, evidently a doctor, had knelt down and injected something into the unconscious man's veins. The man stirred, and groaned feebly, but did not open his eyes.

"I'm afraid we're too late," commented the doctor regretfully.

They waited, but consciousness did not return. Fifteen minutes later, he was dead. The robots carried his body away.

Arwon said heavily, "This means that in future we must take account of the possibility of spies."

"And of invasion," added the Captain, sunk deep in gloom.

Medlana shook her head slowly. A beautiful girl, but a stubborn one, thought Correll. She said, "I'll admit that there are dangers we have overlooked. But once he got here, he didn't last long. In a way, this entire incident is reassuring. Whatever mistakes we make, at least we can be certain that the climate of Ganymede isn't very suit-

able for the members of the R group."

"Just as you were certain that none of them could get here at all," observed Correll. "Personally, I think you've been suffering from a heavy attack of over-confidence."

The others nodded solemnly, sobered by the shattering of their illusions.

X

WHEN Correll saw Medlana again, two days later, he himself was under the influence of the decelerating drug, while she was undrugged. He was beginning to find it a frustrating experience to associate with people who lived on so different a time scale, and as an outsider among them he had begun to experience some of the tensions which they themselves must have felt on Earth.

But in Medlana's presence, much of the tension disappeared. In talking to her, he tried to forget, for as long as he could, that they belonged to different human types, and he could think only that this was the beautiful girl with whom he had fallen in love.

She herself, however, usually preferred to speak of subjects less likely to be charged with emotion. That was why, he supposed, she took him to see what she proudly referred to as a hospital. This was another low building, somewhat longer and wider than most of the others. Inside it were two main divisions, with some two dozen beds in each. One of the divisions, or wards, contained patients who had suffered more or less ordinary illnesses or accidents, and in this he was little interested. But the other division contained ten patients in a comatose condition.

She was surprised to find him shaken at the sight of them. About the patients themselves there seemed to be nothing shocking. They lay there in their beds, each with the intravenous feeding apparatus operating or ready at the side of the bed, their faces as completely relaxed as if in sleep. Or in death.

She asked gently, "Is there something

wrong? I didn't think you were so sensitive—"

"I'm not. But this—" he gestured toward the wing of the hospital—"this reminds me of my mother. She's been in a coma for more than eight years."

Her voice was soft. "And they can do nothing for her? No, I needn't ask, for I know they can't." She came closer to him in apology. "I'm sorry I brought you here."

He shook his head. "It's all right. It was just the momentary shock. I hadn't been thinking of her, and this suddenly reminded me. So you're looking for a cure too?"

"We may be closer to one than your Martian doctors, with all their advantages in equipment. We're looking harder. In fact, we think that we have actually cured one patient, although we couldn't repeat the cure with any of the others."

"What do you think causes the trouble? Cases of what have been called 'sleeping sickness' have been known for centuries, millenia—"

"None like this," she said thoughtfully. "The ordinary types of sleeping sickness involve a paralysis or inhibition of certain parts of the brain. The symptoms are loss of consciousness, along with the slightly lower metabolism that accompanies a decrease in activity. This form here is primarily a metabolism disorder. That's why we're so interested. If we get to the root of the disease, we expect to produce not only a cure for this type of coma, but new accelerant and decelerant drugs as well."

"That's a big 'if.'"

"We think we know some of the answers now. If the entire metabolism is speeded up or slowed down, all of the important parts of it at about the same overall rate, we simply have people who act and react faster or more slowly than usual. If the change is sufficient, we have new types of human beings. But if there is too great a difference in metabolic rate between different parts of the body, as in cases of thyroid or other

common hormone disorders, we have serious illness. We are convinced that these cases of coma are due to such severe disharmonies in the metabolism."

"Let's take a specific case," he said. "The men of your group have luxuriant beards, if I am to believe Arwon, because their hair grows at about the normal rate, while the rest of their metabolism is slowed down. That doesn't result in any shock."

"The rate of growth of hair is not very important for the functioning of the body. But if the heart metabolism is slowed down to one-tenth, while that of the lungs is the same as before, there is trouble. If the trouble comes during the early part of life, when the organs are growing, death is liable to ensue rapidly. If it comes later, you're liable to have what the doctors know as 'disfunction,' along with other unpleasant consequences."

"And what do you think causes all this?"

"We can't prove it, but we believe the cause is related to the tremendous strains of interplanetary travel. The passage through seemingly gravityless space, and the adjustment of living on planets of lower gravity is part of it. And when you combine that sort of strain with the wide variations of temperature, cosmic radiation, gas content of the atmosphere, composition of food grown under different conditions, and so on, you have all sorts of possibilities that will cause hormone changes in the human body. We find that all our cases have either developed on Mars, or to a lesser extent on Venus, or in people who have lived for a long period of time on Mars or Venus, and then moved to another planet."

HE STOOD there silently, thinking over not so much the actual words she had used as the meaning that lay behind them. For the first time, it seemed to him, there was a possibility that his mother might be cured. For the first time there was hope that she might

once more become a living being, awake and enjoying life. For the first time in many years she would be able to look at him and know him for her son.

He said huskily, "If you could put together what you know with what they've found out on Mars, plus what the R group has learned, you might have a cure right now."

"Possibly," she admitted. "Unfortunately, that can't be done right now. And as for the R group—I don't think that they have much information of this kind."

"You underestimate them; you consistently underestimate them. If they could smuggle a spy here, under circumstances so difficult for them, they must know more than you supposed. They probably have your accelerating and decelerating drugs."

She thought that over. "I'm afraid they may have," she admitted. "I'll admit too that the presence of their spy came as a shock. We had no reason to suspect him—and we still don't know how he was placed among us. We've traced his history back some distance, and so far as we have been able to learn, it seems absolutely unquestionable. Either he's been incredibly skillful in disguising his trail, or we need new investigators. In any case, I find it impossible to believe that he could have carried out his pose as one of us for three years."

"They may have better, longer-acting drugs, with less toxicity than yours."

"Perhaps. At any rate, the man came from Earth, and we're trying to trace his activities there. Unfortunately, with the Earth government aroused, it isn't so easy to work there as it was formerly. We've had to move our retreats to new locations, including the one you visited, and there has been considerable disorganization. It won't be long, however, before we adjust to the new situation."

"And the R group?"

"They're on the run too. Their colony on Venus was too accessible, and has been smashed. And they have no such

retreat as ours on Ganymede to serve as a permanent base." She sighed. "It's a sad thing, isn't it, to be fighting with each other simply because of differences in metabolism? Let's forget about it. Do you want to see one of our mines?"

Without waiting for him, she led him away. They wore their modified space-suits as before, but at their present lowered speed there was no need to use their oxygen tanks, and Correll, despite the chill of the thin air he breathed, felt alert and well.

OVERHEAD, as he looked up through decelerated eyes, the great bulk of Jupiter was visibly crawling across the sky, while almost half a dozen of its other satellites swarmed around it. The mines were an hour's walk away—although it would take them ten hours at a decelerated pace. That was time enough for Jupiter to make a complete revolution, but he wouldn't see both sides of the planet, for before it turned completely it would have set, to rise again much later.

They walked rapidly—rapidly for decelerated individuals, Correll had to remind himself—exultant in the lightness of their bodies. Medlana pointed out the features of the landscape as they went along. There were so many peaks, that at first Correll thought it would be impossible to tell one from another. But after a time he did notice that the one they used as a guide was to the left of a group of three which rose higher than all the others in their immediate neighborhood. The shadows ebbed and flowed around them like living things as the mother planet and its satellites raced ahead, but there was no sign of more organic life. No planets of any kind, no trees or grass to cover the rocks and lend variety to the landscape.

He asked Medlana about it, and she shook her head. "There are no native wild animals on Ganymede. We have grown a few plants on a few slopes, but they have a difficult time of it in the dim sunlight."

"It's a sad-looking satellite. It looks like the victim of a great catastrophe."

"Eventually we'll change its appearance," she said confidently. "We have our imported food plants at the colony itself. And once we're sure of our own safety, we'll introduce the best-adapted plants and animals from other planets and turn Ganymede into a garden."

From ahead of them, sounding clearly through the thin air, there soon came the steady buzz of mining drills. But it was not until they had passed the next peak that he saw the entrance to the mine.

The shaft was sunk at an angle into the side of the mountain, and it ran down a hundred feet before twisting off. As Medlana led the way into it, he noted that there were no such things as timbers to shore up the roof. In the new world of Ganymede, wood was a rare and expensive material. It had to be imported across hundreds of millions of miles of interplanetary space, and was hardly worth the trouble. Here it wasn't needed at all. In the cold light of the torch that Medlana held up, the roof and sides of the shaft sparkled like gems. He noted that everywhere there was a lining of a glassy semi-transparent material.

"We simply fuse and vitrify the rock as we dig," Medlana pointed out. From ahead of them came the burr of the drills, ever louder and louder. Soon they were at the mine itself.

The digging was completely automatic and electronic. Not even man-like robots seemed to be needed to direct it. Drills with new carbide tips, far harder and more efficient than the ancient diamond points, cut into the solid rock as if it were butter, and as the rock fragments were broken off, they were pulled into a conveyor stream of high-pressure air and moved along the tunnel.

"The shaft has an exit on the other side of the hill," explained Medlana. "The ore is refined there."

"Does the refining plant have anything more to show than there is here?"

he demanded.

She laughed. "You can see the final product—gleaming bricks of metal, purified and stamped with the isotope number. But there are no flames, no lights. The process is entirely electromagnetic, instead of chemical in the usual sense, and the metal ions are separated without making a striking display."

"I thought that you had a use for robots here."

"We do. They're the overseers. If anything goes wrong with the automatic mining machinery, they make repairs."

"Suppose something goes wrong with the robots themselves?"

"That doesn't happen very often. But if it does, they emit an automatic radio distress signal, and we send help at once."

"This is too efficient a process," he muttered. "And the more efficient, the less interesting."

MEDLANA seemed slow in answering. As he looked up at her, it seemed to him that her features were congealing, almost as if into a mask. And then the truth struck him. She herself wasn't changing, but he was. The decelerating drug had suddenly worn off. He was back to normal now, and without an additional supply of the drug, he would stay that way.

Medlana was saying something in reply to his own remark, but the sounds came so slowly that it was impossible for him to keep track of what they meant. Once more the barrier of their difference was between them.

The buzz of the drilling came at the same pitch as before. That was interesting, he thought. Evidently, the sound-receptors in the ears were not directly affected by the change in metabolism, at least for sounds of medium range. Otherwise, the apparent pitch would have been raised ten octaves to correspond to his own accelerated metabolism, and the sound would have been entirely beyond the range of his hearing.

Another sound came unexpectedly to him, a tearing, rending sound, sharp as the edge of a knife-blade. He looked up. The ceiling of vitrified rock had cracked suddenly, and before his eyes the crack spread. Directly over him a piece of rock fell, and he leaped back to escape it. The crackling sounds deepened, became more sullen. With a threatening roar, an entire section of the roof caved in. Some of the rocks bruised his shoulder, and one scraped his face.

"Medlana!" he cried.

The tunnel between them was blocked. The rockfall had come so quickly that at her lower rate of speed she had been unable to make for safety. Yell as loud as he could, she couldn't hear him.

Frantic with fear for her, he turned on his radio set, a tiny version of the ancient walkie-talkie. "Medlana, can you hear me? Don't give up—I'll get to you!"

The rockfall had stopped. He ripped at the fallen pieces and tossed them behind him down the tunnel. Enormous boulders that he would never have been able to lift on Earth, he grasped and threw behind him with one hand on Ganymede. As he worked feverishly, he thought, "If I could only get those robots to help!"

But the robots knew of nothing wrong. In the section of the tunnel ahead of him, the drilling went on, and up above, the mined ore was being electronically refined. The robots had not been alerted to pay any attention to an alarm that did not involve cessation of mining operations. They had their own job to do, and they continued to do it.

As he tossed the barrage of rocks behind him, he felt a catch in his throat, and had a fit of choking. At his present pace, the thinness of the Ganymede air constricted his chest, made it impossible for him to breathe. He turned on the oxygen of his tank, took a deep, gasping breath of relief, and worked on.

Medlana. Now, as the sound of some one's labored breathing came to him, his heart seemed to leap for joy. Then a sound—the syllable long drawn out, but capable of meaning only one thing—"Help!" Only, somehow, it did not seem like Medlana's voice. It was too harsh, too deep—

It struck him then. It wasn't her voice at all. He had accidentally tuned in on someone from the colony itself. "Help—" came the plea again. Then a long hissing sound—"spy!"

He turned off the radio. Whatever else was happening, he had to free Medlana.

Only a few seconds later he caught sight of her through the gap he had made in the rockslide, and at that he redoubled his efforts. She was lying on the ground, apparently motionless.

When he had cleared away the last few rocks that blocked his path, and he caught his first clear glimpse of her, he stood in horror. A gray rock lay across her back. If it had fallen directly across her, if her back was broken—

And then the hair stood up on the back of his neck, for the rock had moved. It had inched forward over Medlana's body like an incredibly sluggish snail. It was not a rock at all, it was alive!

There had seemed to be no need for hand weapons, and like everyone else here, he was unarmed.

He kicked viciously at the gray mass, and felt a pain in his toe. If the thing weren't inanimate rock, at least it was just as hard. He kicked at it again, and rolled it down the tunnel, toward where the automatic drills followed the vein of ore.

Apparently the thing was full of metal. Two drills at the end of long metal arms left the vein of rock and converged upon it. He heard the buzz of contact, and a second later the thing shattered into a dozen pieces, while the drills returned to the original vein.

Gently he picked up Medlana and carried her down the tunnel. In the open air once more, he set her down carefully.

WHILE he worked he had been keeping his ears alert for any reply from

It was hard to tell whether she was breathing or not, but as he watched, she opened her eyes with that incredible slowness of her group, and he almost sobbed with relief.

Medlana's hand moved slowly to a pocket of her spacesuit, then to her mouth. A second later, she sat up.

"The accelerating drug?" he asked.

She nodded. "We always keep some on hand for emergencies. But this emergency came so quickly I had no chance to act."

"Are you hurt?"

She seemed to consider. "I feel bruised. But I think that my suit protected me to some extent."

"I'll have to get you back to the colony. It's lucky that Ganymede gravity is so low, because I think I'll have to carry you."

"Oh, no, I can walk."

But when she stood up, she almost fell, and he was glad to take her in his arms. Once he kissed her.

"You're taking unfair advantage of me," she said. "You know I'm in no position to resist."

"That's a good reason."

"What caused that rockfall?"

"Why change the subject?" he demanded.

"Because I want you to keep your eyes on where you're going." She said, "Rockfalls have taken place on several occasions, although never before when there were people around to be hurt. I see no reason for those vitrified ceilings to collapse."

"I can think of one." He told her of the sluggish creature he had seen, and as she shuddered, he added, "The thing seems to be made of metal silicates, and to be little more animate than the rocks among which it lives. It was probably walled in above the ceiling, and made an effort to get out."

"And we thought there were no living creatures native to Ganymede."

"You might call this half-living."

"It half-killed me. I couldn't breathe. If I had been inhaling the air at the ordi-

nary metabolic rate, I'd have suffocated before you could reach me."

"I tried to talk to you by radio—and incidentally, I received another call for help."

He told her of the words which he had overheard, and her face clouded. "Another spy. And we thought they couldn't possibly reach us."

"It may be a false alarm."

"I hope so." Correll staggered, and she said, "Even on Ganymede, I'm not so easy to carry over such rugged rocks. I think you had better put me down. I feel well enough to walk now, and we'll make better time that way."

He kissed her once more, then set her down. She had difficulty keeping her balance at first, but he supported her with his arm across her shoulder, and soon she was walking steadily.

Less than an hour later, they arrived at the colony to find Arwon and his group in a state of considerable excitement.

XI

MEDLANA!" cried Arwon. "Where have you been?"

"At the mine. Who called for help?"

"I did. I found a spy, but he knocked me unconscious, and escaped." He glowered as he added, "But it won't take us long to capture him. We're looking for him now."

"How do you look?" asked Correll curiously.

"It's simple enough. He may have trained himself to move slowly, but he can't control his rate of breathing. We'll search for a man who breathes rapidly—"

"You may run across someone who has used the accelerating drug, as you yourself are doing. The spy may have used the decelerating drug."

Arwon grinned. "We can handle that all right. We have a drug neutralizer that takes effect within five minutes. We inject that, and then test the rate of breathing."

Mediana asked, "Do you have any idea where the spy is hiding, or will you have to test the entire colony?"

"I don't know where he is," admitted Arwon. "But the tests won't take long, in any case. I'll appoint a dozen squads to carry them out."

He began to go through the list of the colony's personnel. As each person's name was called, the individual stepped forward into line. When a line of fifty had been formed, a new line was started, while a nurse took a position at one end of the previous line, giving rapid injections of the neutralizing drug. At the end of a five minute period, the order was given to inhale.

Every one inhaled. For five minutes, not a breath was released. Another five minutes, and no one turned blue.

"Passed," remarked Arwon briefly. "Next line."

The other testing squads worked just as rapidly. Several hours later, Arwon said, "Everyone has been tested except an individual called Matthew Larkin. He doesn't respond to his name."

"There is no place to hide here," said Mediana.

"Not in the colony itself," agreed Arwon. "And if he tries hiding in the mountains, he'll either starve or freeze, or run out of oxygen."

"What's to prevent him," asked Correll, "from hiding out until everyone has gone about his business, and then slipping back and mingling with the rest of the group? Those beards of yours are excellent disguises. And I take it that he did have a beard, or he wouldn't have made much of a spy in the first place."

Arwon had apparently become somewhat touchy on the subject of beards. He said coldly, "We're watching the road from the mountains."

"But suppose he didn't take to the mountains at all. If I were in his place, I'd prefer to remain in the colony."

"There are no hiding places here."

"No? What about the robot factory? He could pretend to be a robot himself."

"Don't talk nonsense," replied Arwon.

"We can detect the difference between metal and flesh and blood in a fraction of a second."

"You can if you think of it. But so far you don't seem to have thought of it."

"Very well, then I'll have it done. Any other hiding places you can think of?"

"One more. Come with me."

Correll led the way to the hospital. When he counted the patients in one of the wards, his eyes glittered with triumph. "I think," he said softly, "that you have acquired an additional coma case."

As Arwon blinked in amazement, a bearded man sprang up from one of the beds. He ran at a rapid, but normal, human pace, through the hospital and out the exit on the other side.

The three of them ran after him. When they reached the open air once more, they found a fight going on.

Correll gazed in fascination. It was the same kind of unequal struggle that he had seen take place between Pappas and the prisoners in the retreat of the R group.

THE fugitive had been cornered by a dozen slow-moving members of the colony. But they moved in too frozen a manner to harm him. As one of them lifted an arm, the fugitive raced in, landed a punch, and slipped past his victim. The whole thing took place so rapidly that the stricken man had not even time to fall before the desperate fugitive was attacking his next victim.

They were helpless, thought Correll, they'll never catch him. Even if they used the accelerating drug to bring their speed up to his level, he would be able to continue playing his game of hide and seek with them amid the mass of slow-moving colonists.

And then two robots appeared, and the chase took on a different complexion.

The robots moved with inhuman smoothness, and with inhuman speed. They did not collide with the human beings between them and the man they were hunting, they simply slipped past

them. In a matter of seconds, they had cornered their quarry near the edge of a building. As he attempted desperately to slip into the building itself, a robot arm shot out, and the steel fingers clamped around his flying wrist.

The chase was over.

While the man was still fighting to catch his breath, Arwon approached and said grimly, "It was stupid of you to think you could escape. Now, talk! Who sent you here?"

"No one," panted the man sullenly.

"We won't believe that. You're a spy, and you're sending back reports on our activities. Who are your accomplices?"

"I'm not a spy. I have no accomplices."

"Then how did you get here?"

The man licked his lips. "I was born on Mars. I got along all right there, but when I went to Earth on a freighter, I had trouble. Maybe it was the gravity, or the air, but I couldn't get used to things. Everything seemed too fast for me. Then I met a guy who said he knew some people I'd get along with all right. He said I could have a job with them if I wanted it."

"You claim that one of our agents hired you?"

"I don't know who he was. He brought me to a hotel, just an ordinary hotel, and gave me a job there. Later he found I had experience on spaceships, and he said I could have a job on that ship that came here. That's how I got to this place."

Arwon shook his head. "You'll have to do better than that. Your story just doesn't make sense."

"It's the truth."

"You say that you were hired because one of our agents thought that you were a little slower than normal human beings, and thought you'd be sympathetic to us for that reason. But you would never have got to the spaceship. That was reserved for our own people, not for those we hired."

The man was silent. Medlana asked, "When did you steal a supply of our drugs?"

"I didn't steal any drugs. I just found—I mean, this fellow gave me—"

"Tell the truth," said Arwon sternly. "It will be easier than getting tangled up in lies."

"I am telling the truth," repeated the man sullenly. "If you don't believe me, that's your tough luck. I'm not going to say any more."

"We'll see about that later," promised Arwon. He gestured to the robots. "Take him away, and keep him safe."

When the robots had taken their prisoner away, Correll said, "That's a strange sort of spy. I should think that Hjalmar could do better than that."

"I don't think he's a spy at all," replied Medlana. "He sounds to me more like an unfortunate misfit who decided that he'd found people who were slower, and hence less shrewd than himself, and decided to take advantage of them."

BUT the disconcerting thing," mused Arwon aloud, "is that he's been able to get here. Do you realize, Medlana, that makes two of them on the same ship? Our organization must be extremely lax to allow a man of this kind on board, and our records are undoubtedly being kept in the most slipshod way. The two men should have been detected, if by no other method, by the amount of food they consumed on board the ship. With their higher metabolism they must have eaten at least ten times as much as any of the others did. And yet their feats with knife and fork seem to have gone unnoticed."

"They may have eaten their extra meals in secret," suggested Correll.

"They should have been detected anyway. Incidentally," added Arwon, "that brings up another question. About your own status, Correll. You have been living the life of a privileged person here. You tend to forget that you are a prisoner."

"Thanks to your own kindness, Arwon, I shall never forget how you taught me strategy."

"I'm being serious, Correll, and I ad-

vise you to be also. You have been allowed considerable liberty on Ganymede, and I am beginning to wonder whether it isn't more than a coincidence that your arrival here was accomplished by the discovery, for the first time, of spies among us."

"You forget that your people themselves kidnapped me in order to get me here."

"I'm beginning to wonder whether you mightn't have arranged your kidnapping yourself. You may have expected to find us, and anticipated what we would do."

"You flatter me. And, I think that you underestimate my friend, Hjalmar. If I could locate you, his agents must have been able to do the same. If there's been any spying, which I doubt, he's your man."

"I am of the same opinion," agreed Arwon grimly. "Just as I don't doubt that you've been the one who's been helping him. Incidentally, while you were away, we received another message from your friend, Hjalmar. It was a warning that our whereabouts were known, and that we would be followed. He advised us to surrender."

"Hjalmar sometimes has a tendency to let his suggestions run away from him," said Correll, smiling.

"He did seem a bit glib. I wondered as I listened to him whether he planned to take a ship here to receive our surrender in person, and just then, almost as if he could read my mind across hundreds of millions of miles of space, he said that he was going to do exactly that."

"Hjalmar doesn't boast idly."

Medlana said, "Our position here is becoming more serious every day. I'm beginning to wonder whether we hadn't better leave Ganymede altogether."

Arwon shook his head, his beard wagging defiance. "No, my dear Medlana, there is no better place for us. What has happened simply points up the need to speed up our defenses. If Hjalmar does manage to send a ship here, he will

have to send so many supplies that it will have little fighting capacity. The advantages will be ours."

"Especially once our robot factory is capable of operating itself," added Medlana.

"And that time isn't far off," said Arwon. "Incidentally, Correll, the factory is one of the things you will not be permitted to see. We are taking no chances of sabotage."

"Have you always been that careful, Arwon?" asked Correll politely. "It seems to me that your two so-called spies have had considerable freedom of movement here, much more than I have had. Are you sure that they have avoided the robot factory?"

Above the brown beard, the skin paled. Arwon said, "Nothing has gone wrong. Nothing can have happened—" he interrupted himself to shout a rapid order into a phone on the wall.

"You have a great talent," suggested Correll mildly, "for locking the stable door after the horse has been stolen. I hope that this horse is still there—but if those men were really spies, I doubt it."

Arwon cursed, in a most impolite and unprophetlike way, and rushed out. Medlana said, "You don't really think that anything can have happened?"

"I hope not, for your sake."

An alarm bell sounded. Correll looked at Medlana and said, "It seems that I was right. The horse has been stolen."

XII

THEY found Arwon outside the robot factory, snapping out orders. Medlana asked, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing much, except that some essential electronic valves have been destroyed, and no more robots can be made until they are replaced."

"Destroyed?" asked Correll. "Are you sure that the wrecked parts can't be repaired?"

"I'm not sure of anything. I haven't found any wrecked parts. They've sim-

ply disappeared."

"Stolen," observed Correll.

"What makes you sure that the valves haven't been destroyed?"

"Because the man is obviously a thief, and thieves steal to make a profit."

Very well, then," said Arwon, grim again. "We'll get the truth from him."

"How?"

"We'll force him to tell."

"Threats? He'll deny everything. Torture? You're not torturers, and you wouldn't know how to begin. Psychological pressure? Excellent, if you have the trained psychologists."

"We haven't," admitted Arwon.

"Then I suggest my way," said Correll, thinking that he must make the most of this chance to prove himself a friend to Medlana and her cause.

"And that is?"

"Set a thief to catch a thief. I volunteer to play the thief of the first part."

A short time later he was under the window of the building where the prisoner had been placed. He tapped gently on the wall.

A hoarse voice came from within. "Who's there?"

"Shhh! I want to talk to you."

The voice was lower this time. "Who are you?"

"Never mind, so long as I'm willing to do business. I want those valves you got away with."

There was a short pause. "What? I don't know what you're talking about."

"Electronic valves, you fool, I want to buy them."

"I don't have any."

"If you're smart, you'll sell them now, —at a good price."

"I don't have any valves."

"I know you don't have them in there, but Arwon will get them from you anyway. He'll torture them out of you—unless you sell them to me first."

"I don't—how much?"

"That's better. Ten credits a valve. For all you've got."

"Ten? They're worth a hundred!"

"Not with you in jail they aren't.

Make up your mind. Ten a piece or nothing. And don't get the idea that you can take the credits and then hold out on me. Just try it, and I'll bring Arwon down on you so fast it won't be funny."

"Let's see the money!"

"How many do you have?"

"A thousand. They're tiny, and they don't take up much room. But I won't tell you where they are until you pay me."

Correll passed ten thousand credits through the window. "Now, where are they?"

"In that hospital, under the mattress of one of those dead guys. They never would have thought of looking there."

"They never would have," agreed Correll grimly.

A FEW moments later he was reporting to Arwon and Medlana. Sure enough, they found the valves under the mattress of one of the comatose patients. "We'd have found them there anyway, sooner or later," said Arwon sourly.

"Later, much later," Correll told him. "And it's worth the money to have them now, so that you can keep your factory going."

"I'll admit you were clever. But now I'm going to take that money back."

"And shock the poor man into losing his faith in human nature? We made a bargain, and we're going to keep it."

"I made no bargain," snarled Arwon.

"I made it for you, as your agent. If you want the money get it honestly, as he did."

"Honestly! That thief!"

"Sell him something. Something worth ten thousand credits."

"We are not merchants."

"You were willing to buy things from me. Now, practice selling things to him. Things like food, for instance."

Medlana laughed. At a thousand credits per meal perhaps?

"Exactly. And a tank of oxygen at five thousand credits. He won't like your business tactics, but you can point out to him that he has the demand for food

and air, and you have the supply of both, and there you are."

"That's what you call getting the money honestly?" demanded Arwon. "You and your trickery turn my stomach." He whirled around and stalked angrily out of the room.

"His stomach may be turned, but he'll do it anyway," predicted Correll cheerfully.

Medlana stared at him in amusement. "You're becoming genuinely gifted," she said.

"That's because I've had such good teachers. Arwon has beaten me shamefully at chess, using tricks I never knew existed. And you've taught me not to be stuffy. I'm not a completely stupid pupil."

"You may be learning too rapidly for your own good. Arwon dislikes you more and more—and as Security Chief, he's getting more and more power. There's a Council meeting tonight, and he intends to have you sent away from here."

He looked into her eyes, and said, "Because of you, Medlana."

"Partly because of me," she admitted. "But there are other reasons as well. You're learning too much about this place, and you've shown that you can be a shrewd and dangerous opponent. If you get out of control, you can move too rapidly to be handled by any of us here."

"There are always the robots."

"But suppose you learned how to control them? Arwon feels that there is that possibility."

"He flatters me."

"Not at all. He's aware of the robots' limitations. They're very powerful and utilitarian, but they're also inordinately complicated, and the more complicated an apparatus is, the more things there are to go out of order. That's been one of the things holding up the full operation of the factory. Unless there has been the most careful supervision—human supervision—the robots made have been only *approximately* perfect. And that isn't good enough. An imperfect

robot is a useless robot."

"Like a human being. And he feels that I might learn too much about your robots?"

Medlana nodded. "Unless you're sent away."

"But what does he want to do with me?"

"Ship you off to Mars, where you can be used by our organization in various ways."

"I'd be an even greater danger to your people there, where there'd be no trouble at all contacting my own type of human beings."

"Arwon feels that they would have ways of keeping you under control."

They would, thought Correll gloomily. Under other circumstances he would have been delighted to get back to home, but now it would mean leaving Medlana for good. And he could not leave her. . . .

HE WAS a weak-minded fool, he told himself, too irresolute to put an end to a situation that if allowed to drag on could have no happy ending. He repeated to himself all the old arguments and added some new ones. They would have no mental contact except when one or the other of them was drugged. He would grow old and die while Medlana hardly changed. And their children—if it was possible for two individuals of so different a nature to have children—whom would they resemble? Would they be slow-moving and long-lived, like Medlana, so that he would spend the rest of his life watching them grow out of infancy? Or would they be like him, speeding through their lives while Medlana remained young, to confound everyone with children older than herself?

No, the entire situation was intolerable. And perhaps he owed Arwon a debt of gratitude for wanting to solve a problem he himself lacked the courage to tackle.

The next day, however, he learned that there had been a change of plan. Medlana and Arwon came to him, and the latter said curtly, "Correll, we've de-

cided what to do about you. We're going to put you to work."

"Here? Not on Mars?"

"Here. We won't be sending any ships to Mars for a while."

"May I know the reason?"

Arwon hesitated. Medlana said, "The secret can't last long. We are going to be invaded. We'll need every ship we can muster to help in the defense."

"So Hjalmar wasn't making an idle threat!"

"It isn't Hjalmar alone. It's the R group. The government threatened to launch a remote-control attack on their Earth base, and gave them an ultimatum to surrender. They didn't surrender, but they did give up their base. They managed to get through the government lines and commandeer a space ship, in which they headed for a recently established secret colony of their own, in the Asteroid Belt."

"They won't be able to hold out there."

"They don't intend to. Their real destination is Ganymede. They mean to take over our own colony."

Arwon put in, "Our informant—" Correll noted with amusement that he did not say "spy"—"reports that they are confident that they will be able to cross the distance that separates us from the Mars orbit. That means that they have solved the food and air problems that stopped them before."

"They had been doing research work on that," said Correll. "And remember that they work at about a hundred times your normal rate."

"We can't help remembering," Arwon admitted gloomily.

"However, I don't see how it's possible for them, even with rapid-growing plants of the most primitive sort, to produce sufficient food during their space trip itself, unless they have a ship with a very large food-growing compartment."

"They haven't," said Medlana. "They have an ordinary, rather small freighter, which was the best thing they could

piec^e up in a hurry."

"Then the air-recirculating system would be even less efficient than for an ordinary passenger ship."

Medlana observed slowly, "That means that they would have to tear out a good part of the inside of the ship, in order to convert it to their purposes, and that they would have to rebuild it while it was in flight."

"Without the equipment to do it with. The equipment would probably be obtained at that colony you mentioned, somewhere in the Asteroid Belt. And incidentally, the Asteroid Belt itself is rather far out. How could they establish a colony there in the first place, with their rapid consumption of food and air?"

"They couldn't," said Medlana, "unless they slowed their metabolism. They've probably learned the secret of some of our own drugs."

"Or have developed better ones of their own."

ARWON'S eyes brightened. "If they're slowed up by drugs, then they've lost their chief advantage over us. In fact, if we use our robots, we have the advantage over them. I'm going to suggest to the Council that we don't wait for them to land. The best thing would be to go to meet them unexpectedly in space, and blast them before they can get close to us."

"Provided there are no complications," said Medlana.

"Complications?" repeated Arwon. "You mean Hjalmar?"

"If his attempt at invasion came at the same time as that of the R group, the situation would be serious."

Arwon said soberly, "When he completes his plans, we shall hear of it soon enough from our informants in government service. Meanwhile, let us prepare a ship to intercept the R group. As for you, Correll, we should like to set you to work on the procurement and organization of supplies."

"Do you think I can be trusted?"

Arwon said slowly, "No. But I do not think you would do anything to harm Medana. And at any rate, we have no choice. We must set to work every man we can spare. Even that thief. Of course, we must provide the proper supervision for both you and him. We shall also withdraw the robots from the mine, and put them on defense work until the crisis is past."

"I take it that from now on, in order to speed things up, the entire colony will be using the accelerating drug as much as possible."

"We must be careful of the danger of physiological breakdown. But we shall use the drug to as great an extent as our limits of tolerance permit. Unfortunately, my own personal limit is rather low."

Correll remembered that first interview he had had with Arwon, and the way the bearded man had collapsed. Yes, there was a limit to what the drugs would do. The time to prepare for invasion was all too short. The advantage lay with the aggressors.

Overhead, the tiny sun set, the disappearance of its weak direct rays hardly noticed in the glare of reflected planet-light that came from the great body of Jupiter. But day or night, thought Correll, the work of preparation would go on. And once more he would settle down to the routine of hard work that had, in the past, filled so many of his days.

XIII

THERE were times when he was frustrated to the point of exasperation.

It was bad enough to deal with ordinary people. Here he had to give orders to people on whom it was impossible to rely. He would tell a man to do something that might be expected to take an hour. The man would start to carry out the order—and halfway through the work, he would reach the limit of his ability to function under drugs, and the work would slow down. Or worse still, he would collapse, and be useless for

days. Time schedules kept going awry, and it seemed impossible to co-ordinate the work groups.

After a day or two, however, Correll did manage to put some sort of system into their operations. He kept track of each man's drug tolerance, and the number of hours during which he had been accelerated. Men who were in similar drug classifications were teamed together, and kept together for as long as they were capable of carrying out the work.

Correll began to learn more about the drugs themselves. There were different varieties that had very similar effects. There were Acceleros A, B and C, and Deceleros A and B, and each man used the particular variety of accelerating drug for which he had the greatest tolerance.

They could all be used, Correll discovered, in several ways. Sometimes they were given by injection into a vein or muscle, sometimes they were taken by mouth, occasionally they were breathed in as an invisible, odorless mist. They worked very quickly, and usually very suddenly, so that there was ordinarily a sharp difference between a man undrugged and the same man drugged. They almost never worked to a partial extent; either the drugged individual was accelerated to approximately normal human speed, or he was not accelerated at all. And the duration of the drugging was directly proportionate to the dose.

Correll was beginning to take pride in his work, even though he did not at first realize the purpose of the supplies he was assembling. It was only after overhearing several indiscreet remarks of Arwon's that he realized what his group was doing. They were preparing the raw materials for narcotic guns.

The arsenal of weapons was not a varied one, and the narcotic guns seemed to play an important role among the hand weapons. They were to be used at fairly close range, no more than a hundred yards, and they would not kill, except by accident. They would be charged

with tiny shells loaded with Decelero A, whose effectiveness he himself had often experienced. The shells would explode near the human target and bathe the latter in a cloud of drug. The victim would not at first know that anything had happened to him, although to unaffected individuals about him he would seem almost paralyzed. Not until he saw the world rushing crazily past his eyes would he realize that he himself had been decelerated.

AT FIRST Correll wondered why, despite the obvious distrust in which Arwon held him, he was permitted to retain so responsible a position. But the answer soon became obvious. He was the only man whose normal human speed was not dependent on drugs, the only one who could be certain to keep up a steady pace from day to day, without the danger of collapse.

Not so easy to answer was the question why he himself worked so hard. Was it simply because he had the habit of work, and was willing to put his services at the disposal of anyone who required them? It was more than that, he told himself. It was because these people were not attacking, but defending themselves. They had begun to colonize Ganymede, a satellite which was utterly useless to any other human beings, and they had asked nothing better than to be left alone to take care of themselves.

But the government couldn't afford to leave them alone. No government could tolerate any other ruling authority than itself in its own territory—or in the territory it claimed. And the Earth-Mars-Venus Federated Interplanetary Government laid claim to the entire solar system. Hence Hjalmar had to go to great trouble to rout them from a place that ordinary human beings didn't need and didn't want.

It might have been logical from the government's point of view, but to Correll it seemed absurd. He realized that he had been won over to Medlana's viewpoint, and for a time he wondered

whether all his arguments weren't strictly rationalizations, intended to conceal the fact that he was doing all this just for her. He found it difficult to arrive at a decision. Finally, he shrugged his shoulders. For the moment, the exact reasons didn't matter. The main thing was that he had chosen his side and was going to fight for it.

Medlana herself had work to do, and he saw little of her. One day, when he came over to visit her and discuss materials she was supposed to receive from him, he had a curious feeling of tenseness and anticipation. It was almost as if he expected something of a crucial nature to happen, something that would decide all their fates at one blow.

He said as much to Medlana, and she laughed. "I was wondering if you felt it."

"Don't tell me that I'm psychic," he protested. "I've never had this sort of feeling before."

"Exactly what sort of feeling is it?"

"A sort of electric tingling. My skin seems tight, my hair feels about to stand on end—"

"Exactly. It is an electric feeling. The air now is heavily ionized. It always happens during periods of this kind."

"What's going on?"

"Look up," she suggested.

He stared up at the sky. Jupiter was there, but he had grown so accustomed to the planet's presence that he hardly noticed it any more. Jupiter, and the small sun, and—

"There seem to be an unusually large number of satellites in sight today," he exclaimed suddenly.

"That's it. And as you know, all the planets, and the satellites as well, are giant magnets. They are weak as magnets go, but not too weak to make a difference to the people who live on them. And at times like this, the magnetic and electric fields of the different satellites and of Jupiter itself seem to work together, and strengthen each other greatly. We're going to see some very beautiful auroras."

"Well, I've seen plenty on Mars. And I hear that they have them on Earth too."

"These surpass anything that occurs on either Mars or Earth. Wait and see."

HE BEGAN to see an hour later. Very gradually, the sky above the surrounding mountain peaks had taken on a greenish hue. Now, suddenly, a yellow-blue streamer seemed to leap up from the tallest peak straight at Jupiter itself. The streamer subsided, but a moment later another burst of color shot into the thin air, and this time did not die away completely. Soon there was a rainbow ring of cold flame, boiling and bubbling all around them, erupting suddenly in beautiful and dazzling displays that made everything else seem lurid and unreal.

Mediana came over to him. "I've never seen anything like it," he admitted. "It's worth coming to Ganymede for."

"Yes, the satellite's thin air is like the inside of a great vacuum tube. The eruptions of light go on for days, apparently dying down, and then starting up again. And it moves over almost the entire satellite, as we revolve around Jupiter. The same thing is happening on every mountain range of the hemisphere which has a view of the mother planet."

"The flames travel over Ganymede as it rotates?"

She nodded. "It's an awe-inspiring sight from a million miles out in space. I've seen it on one occasion when we were coming in from Mars and I remember that every one on the ship stared at it as if hypnotized."

He said thoughtfully, "What would happen if any of the attacking ships arrived during the display?"

"Their instruments might be thrown off. And if the pilots have never been to Ganymede before, they'd have trouble locating us to attack."

"Then let's hope that they choose now to get here."

Mediana shook her head. "We'd be better off if they didn't attack at all.

We'd prefer to avoid a fight altogether than to fight a winning war."

Correll said bluntly, "I can't understand why you're preparing these narcotic guns. Do you expect hand-to-hand fighting on an interplanetary scale?"

"Of course," she replied in surprise. "Don't you realize what will happen? They'll probably try to bomb our colony or make it uninhabitable in some way, and then come in for a landing and try to capture us. Well, we intend to anticipate them by evacuating the colony and removing all the valuable machinery the moment we receive word that an attack is imminent."

"That will mean that they will be forced to pursue you into the hills."

"That's exactly what it will mean. They won't be able to wait for us at the colony itself in the expectation of our coming in and giving ourselves up, because with their higher metabolism they require more supplies than we do. They'll be forced to come after us without delay and try to get us. And remember that they don't know these hills as we do. We can hold out in them for weeks, simply by running and hiding, and fighting only when we have to. But I don't think the struggle will be a matter of weeks. They'll be thinking of conserving supplies for the long trip home. Once they realize that time is working against them, they'll give up and leave."

He said cautiously, "It sounds plausible."

"It's been well planned. But I've no more time to discuss it with you. I'd better get back to my work."

Throughout the day the circles of fire continued to flare up and die down. It was only when Jupiter set beneath the horizon that they disappeared entirely. But Correll knew that when Jupiter rose again, they would be back.

LONG before the planet's rim appeared above the horizon, however, their small world had become tense with excitement. A spaceship had been detected fifty million miles out, speeding toward

Ganymede. It was undoubtedly the ship belonging to the R group. If, as they hoped, the men in it were drugged in order to reduce their metabolism, the ship would be relatively defenseless against a sudden attack. Their own waiting ship rocketed into the thin air, and sped to meet it.

Correll asked incredulously, "If it's fifty million miles out, how can you be sure what sort of ship it is? Are you sure of your detection devices at that incredible distance? It seems unbelievable that you could identify the shape of a ship at that distance."

"We're reasonably sure. We have a series of space buoys at intervals of a million miles, from fifty million miles away all the way out to our own orbit. They were distributed a week ago along the course the attacking ship is expected to follow. They are set to go off when a spaceship comes within their range, and to emit a series of continuous radio signals for twenty-four hours."

"And you expect to win an easy victory?"

"We escaped from a ship of the R group before, when we had no weapons with which to hit back. This time we'll smash their ship."

Correll shrugged. Medlana seemed too confident. Once more, he thought, she and her group were overestimating their own abilities and underestimating their opponents. And they were relying too greatly on mechanical plans to check a dangerous and desperate enemy.

For the next few hours they received reports of the progress of their own ship from the same automatic space buoys. Then Jupiter rose again, and the magnetic disturbances began once more. The lights flamed even more dazzlingly than they had done before, and in the center of the ring of mountains which surrounded them, a dark, electrically charged dust cloud arose. From it, streaks of silent lightning flowed toward the cold flames on the mountains. But this time Correll had little eye for the beauty of the atmospheric phenomenon.

The important thing was that the radio signals had been cut off.

They waited impatiently for the planet to set and the signals to resume. When finally the first faint signals were detected, from their own ship, the ship itself was ten million miles away.

"He's making good speed," said Correll.

"Better than the invading ship," said Medlana worriedly. "The last signal from that is at forty-three million miles. It seems to have slowed down."

"But because of the radio disturbances we can't know when the signal was first emitted."

"Unfortunately, the buoys don't give that information. However, there should be a forty-two million mile signal soon."

The expected signal did not come. The defending ship touched off the signals at eleven million, twelve million, and thirteen million miles. But the other ship seemed to have disappeared.

It had still not been detected when radio communications broke once more. The entire colony was in a state of alarm at news of the attacking ship's disappearance, and when Correll saw Arwon later, he found the bearded man nervous and irritable.

"You will finish your next day's work, and begin plans to evacuate," ordered Arwon.

"What do we do with the uncompleted parts?"

"They can't be taken along into the mountains. I'm afraid that they'll have to be destroyed."

"Wouldn't it be better to conceal them, and recover them when we return?"

Arwon glared at him with suspicion. "Are you sure you don't want to leave them to our invaders?"

CORRELL kept his temper. He said, "Of course I'm sure. The invaders would have little use for them. But they're vital to us. We've imported them with great difficulty and at great expense, and if we destroy them now, we'll only have to replace them later."

"There's no place to hide them."

"What about the mine? We could leave them in the shaft, conceal the entrance and exit, and remove all indications that the place has been worked."

Arwon hesitated. He wanted to oppose anything that his rival suggested, but he found it a little difficult, because the idea was too good. He growled finally, "We'll see. Meanwhile, go ahead as ordered. Finish up."

Later on, Correll received orders to use the mine to hide not only the surplus parts, but other valuable supplies as well.

He and his men worked on until long after Jupiter had set. When they finally returned to the colony, they found that the state of excitement had been intensified. Medlana told him, "It's just incredible! They've turned back!"

"Our own ship?"

"The invading ship! We've just received their signal—at fifty million miles! They're heading back for home."

"I don't believe it," asserted Correll flatly.

"The fifty million mile buoy reports a freighter answering to their description, traveling at high speed—"

"In which direction? Toward us or away?"

"I hadn't thought there was any doubt. The last we had heard of the ship, it had reached the forty-three million mile mark, coming toward us."

"Let's check. Where are the recordings of the signals?"

They checked. Medlana stammered, "Why, the ship is coming toward us again. At fifty million miles!"

"I thought so." He smiled grimly. "It's another ship, Medlana. Either a second freighter that the R group managed to steal, or—and I'm inclined to believe that this is more likely—the first ship of a fleet of Hjalmar's."

"Then the ship we detected previously has bypassed the signals?"

"Undoubtedly. If the men in it were to travel in a drugged condition, they must have realized in advance that they

would be helpless before a sudden attack. Therefore, they undoubtedly set their automatic pilot to approach Gany-mede by an indirect path that we could not have predicted in advance. As I told you before, you underestimated them. And your space buoys are now valueless to report their ship's position."

"Then our own ship will miss them in space—"

"But it won't miss Hjalmar's ships. And when it meets them, it will find itself outnumbered. I only hope that the odds are not too great."

But as fuller reports began to come in, even this faint hope died. There were six of Hjalmar's ships, in addition to the ship of the R group.

"Six to one," said Correll. "And this time they'll be prepared for us. There is an outside chance that our own ship can avoid them."

"There's a better hope," argued Medlana. "They'll undoubtedly have to slow down as they approach Gany-mede and look for our colony. And the magnetic lights will make the search difficult. They may run into the ship of the R group. If they were to fight it out between them, it would be to our advantage."

Correll shook his head. "I doubt if they'll be so kind. No, we'd better prepare to carry out our plans for evacuation."

Before the signals were cut off again, they received a report that their own ship was twenty-nine million miles out. And the lead ship of Hjalmar's group had reached the thirty-seven million mile buoy. At some time before the next good radio reception period, the two ships would make contact—and fight it out.

DURING the waiting period they went on with the work of evacuation, moving the invalids from the hospitals to another shaft that had been dug in the mountains, its entrance carefully concealed. Correll's idea of hiding valuable materials in the mine shaft had

been adopted whole-heartedly. Short mine shafts were being sunk and stored with supplies and hand arms. They would serve as places of refuge, and as advance posts for the guerrilla warfare that it might soon be necessary to carry out.

When Jupiter set once more, and the magnetic displays died down, there was a confused burst of radio signals. A group of men and women had gathered around to learn the news, all of them too impatient to wait, all of them accelerated and feverish with drugs.

Arwon demanded, "What happened to our ship?"

The radio operator grunted in disgust at their impatience. "Don't you think I'm as anxious to know as you are? The signal burst is being analyzed."

A robot analyst held out a written report. "First battle report from our ship," he said clearly, in his beautiful tenor voice. "We have incapacitated first enemy vessel and left it a helpless wreck!"

A hum of cheerful conversation arose, almost drowning out the robot's subsequent words. Medlana held up her hand for silence. The robot went on, "Other signals from markers at thirty-eight, thirty-nine, forty, and forty-one million miles. All reported as enemy vessels."

Arwon said triumphantly, "They'll never land. We'll destroy their ships one by one in space. They'll never even come close."

There was another burst of signals. The radio operator said, "This is a single signal beam, and I can analyze it myself. It's from our own ship again. We are attacking second enemy ship. It is helpless before us. We—"

He turned to his waiting listeners. "There's a terrific burst of static. That's all."

"How long before the static will be ended?"

"It's ended now. There are no more signals."

There was an appalled silence. Correll

said, "You will excuse me for being a pessimist. But could that burst of static have been caused by an explosion?"

"It might have," admitted the operator.

"Don't believe him!" shouted Arwon. "He's a spy! He's working for Hjalmar!"

"I didn't say on which ship the explosion occurred," pointed out Correll. "After the work I've been doing for you, it should be hard for you to think of me as a spy."

"I think an apology is due from you, Arwon," said Medlana slowly.

"No, Medlana. You're in love with him, you can't see him as he is." Arwon noticed the surprise on the faces of those around them, and went on in a rage. "He's only pretending to work for us! All those suggestions he made to help us can turn out to benefit them too, once they get here."

Some one asked mildly, "What evidence do you have, Arwon, besides your obvious jealousy, for your statement? Have you caught him spying, or sending information?"

"Great Jupiter, do we have to catch him actually doing it? Isn't it enough that he's their kind—"

Another signal came, this time rapid, but uneven. The radio operator said, "Our ship again."

"Then it wasn't destroyed!" exclaimed Arwon triumphantly.

"Quiet, please. The message reads—no, I'll put it into the vocalizer, and you will be able to hear it for yourself."

The sound came out impersonal, tenor, like the voice of the robots. "Final battle report. We have been hit and disabled. We are no longer capable of defending Ganymede. Protect yourselves."

XIV

THERE was silence in the room.

"Our first victim seems to have been a decoy ship. It was defenseless before us, and its destruction was intended to give us a sense of overconfidence, and

lure us into the trap of the other ships.

"Hjalmar's vessels appear to have been practicing the forgotten art of military maneuver. Somehow they have managed to confuse our own signal buoys with false information. We did not suspect that they were so close to us until we found ourselves surrounded by six of them. We did not have a chance. We have lost none killed, but our fuel supply is gone, the ship is becoming dangerously radioactive, and we are drifting helplessly. We have no choice but to take to the lifeboats and surrender. We can only hope that you have better luck."

One of the men stood up. "There's no reason to despair," he said. "We knew that there was only a forlorn hope, at best, of stopping Hjalmar's ships before they reached here. That hope has failed, but at least we have learned that we are facing a shrewd and tricky enemy. On Ganymede we'll be on our own ground. And we still have a day or two left. I suggest that we all go drug-free for the next day, and prepare to use the drugs when the landing is actually attempted."

There were nods of agreement, and the group broke up. As the men and women separated, they made a curious appearance. The air, for all its electrical properties, seemed cold and cheerless, and at a distance, all objects seen through it acquired a blue-green pallor. They were blue-green people going about their sad blue-green business. The knowledge that they had been so unexpectedly defeated in the first encounter was discouraging.

A dust cloud, its magnetized particles whirling around, alternately attracting and repelling each other, swooped down upon them, adding its own unpleasantness to the spiritual gloom. Correll cursed softly to himself. They had about completed everything they could do in the colony. They would leave behind only a few individuals to man the almost automatic defenses, in the hope of crippling the attackers before the latter could land, and thus making the subsequent defense easier, and then take

to the hills. Correll moved slowly through the deserted rooms of the building where his men had been working. Everything was gone except several pieces of scrap that were of no use. And a pair of narcotic guns, that had been overlooked. Correll picked them up and put them in his pocket.

From out of the dust cloud, a bearded figure emerged. It was Arwon, his face set and stern. "Come to apologize, Arwon?" asked Correll.

"Nothing of the kind. I have come to take you into custody. You are too unreliable to be trusted once the attack actually begins."

"You have no orders from the Council about me."

"I need no orders. I have my own ideas, and they are enough."

"Hardly. Nor is your strength."

Suddenly all the hatred that had been seething within Arwon seemed to burst out of him, leaving him savage and violent, unable to control himself. He sprang forward, his fists flailing awkwardly. One of them caught Correll high up on the forehead and threw him back against the wall.

Arwon drove at him once more, and Correll smashed out in return. Without thinking, he aimed for the jaw, but to know where Arwon's jaw was behind that mass of beard required more penetrating eyes than he had. His fist cut through the tangle of hair and landed on Arwon high up on the chest. The man staggered back, and grunted. Then he rushed forward again.

This time Correll deliberately aimed for the body. His fist caught Arwon above the heart and stunned him. Another punch, and Arwon dropped.

BUT the fight was far from over. Arwon threw himself forward and upward, and tackled him around the waist. Correll had no time to remember that Ganymede's low gravity made it easy for him to leap into the air. His leg moved by little more than reflex action, and his knee caught Arwon on the jaw.

This time the beard was little protection. Correll was conscious of the solidity of the contact as Arwon's head jerked back, and his grip broke.

For a moment, Correll did not suspect what would come next. And then he saw the other man's hand close on a piece of hard rock, and watched the hand jerk back, and the rock fly through the air.

There was no time to duck. The rock grazed his head, and Correll staggered back against the wall.

He would have leaped forward again, but a sudden sense of shame restrained him. They were undignified fools, fighting like animals—for what? For nothing but sheer stupid, animal hatred of each other. And they weren't even fighting intelligently, like human beings, or even like sensible animals. They were like mindless brutes, using arms and legs and straining muscles, but not their brains, not the one thing that made them human.

Correll's hand encountered a plastic object in his pocket. The narcotic gun, of course. It had been stupid of him to forget it. That would have solved his entire problem for him. It still would.

Arwon was launching himself forward in another desperate attack, when Correll pressed the stud. To all appearances, the gun remained unchanged. There was no burst of sound, no recoil.

But about Arwon an invisible mist formed. The momentum he had acquired threw him forward, but this time Correll made no attempt to hit back. He simply sidestepped adroitly.

Arwon fell to the floor. The glitter disappeared slowly from his eyes, and he lay there as if unconscious.

A normal person would have been decelerated. Correll had expected that Arwon, who had been moving under the influence of an accelerating drug, would have been returned to his ordinary condition. He had not expected that the man would lie there without moving at all, without seeming to breathe.

He heard a light step outside, and the next moment Medlana appeared in the

doorway. She stared at him, and demanded, "What happened?"

"We've been fighting." Briefly he explained how Arwon had attacked him, and how he had defended himself.

She knelt beside the fallen man. "He seems to be in a coma."

"Yes, he's very much like those patients you had in the hospital. I seem to have made a scientific discovery. How to produce coma, in one easy lesson," said Correll ironically. "I'm ashamed of myself, Medlana. We both lost our heads."

"Over me?"

"To fight over you might have been excusable. We fought over nothing, simply because we disliked each other. Although, I must admit, you were probably one of the causes of our dislike."

"We can't leave him there."

"No, I'll pick him up and take him to the doctors."

He lifted the bearded man and threw him over his shoulder. But there was little the doctors could do.

"It appears to be a genuine case of metabolic coma," admitted one of them. "But the effects can't be reversed simply by administering an accelerating drug. We've tried that in other cases, and found the procedure to be too dangerous."

"What then?"

"We're not sure what treatment to apply. For the time being we'll have to leave him in a secure place, possibly one of those mine shafts, and come back to him later."

IN THE atmosphere of emergency which now enveloped the colony there was little interest in the fate of one man. Arwon was placed in a secure shelter, and the preparations resumed.

That was the most unpleasant part of it all, thought Correll. For now that most of the preparations had been made, he had nothing to do. A few of the men had alarm posts and some were at fighting stations. But for him, as for most of the rest, the only thing that remained

was to wait for the attack.

Jupiter passed overhead and sank beneath the horizon again, and with the planet went the flaming furies of the aurora. But there were no more messages from space. Their own ship had apparently been taken over by Hjalmar's men. And the remaining space buoys had evidently been bypassed or disabled. Of the ship of Pappas and his men, and of Hjalmar's fleet there was no word.

Medlana and some of the others clung to the hope that the R group and the government ships would encounter and destroy each other, but to Correll the hope seemed forlorn. It was the government that was the real power. As Medlana and the others had pointed out to him long before, once you were on a ship, it wasn't your muscular speed that counted, but the speed of your electronic and mechanical equipment. That far exceeded the speed of any human being. And the government had all the equipment of three worlds to choose from, along with great numbers of space-trained men, and all the supplies their ships could carry. Pappas and his R men had only the meager supplies they had been able to steal.

Another day passed. This time the aurora seemed to have lost some of its former strength. The flames were paler now, they did not reach so high toward the mother planet. Evidently the ions in the atmosphere were being neutralized, the thin air was becoming less electric.

It was after the setting of Jupiter that they received the message. Evidently it had been coming at them for some time, but the magnetic disturbances had remained strong enough to prevent reception. Now, as the flames and static died away, it broke through loud and clear. And with the news, both those members of the Council and all the defenders who had remained in the colony were shocked to alertness. The attack was coming at last.

"Calling Ganymede colony. Calling

Ganymede colony."

The words, as they came from the vocalizer, were curiously slow and uncertain. Correll and Medlana, who had gathered with the others near the spaceport where the message was being received, stared at each other. The speaker seemed weak. Perhaps—it was only a hope, but it began to seem justified—perhaps the R men had used up all their supplies in space. Perhaps instead of demanding the colony's surrender, they would suggest a truce.

In a single burst of sound, the radio operator replied, "Contact." A longer message might have permitted the tracing of the radio beam, might have led to the rapid location of the colony.

"We want to come in for a landing. Where can we land? We have no hostile intentions."

Again the words were weak and slow. Some one said, "It's a trap! They want us to guide them in, so that they can attack us!"

The radio operator nodded. He made no attempt to answer.

But on the incoming ship, someone seemed to have read the distant, fearful minds. The voice went on, "Our intentions are peaceful. We do not intend to fight. We shall cruise about Ganymede at any height you say. You can train whatever guns you have on us to make sure that there is no treachery. Where shall we land?"

There were rapid, angry consultations. If this were a trap, they would fall into it by merely answering. But if it were—why didn't the invaders try to deceive them by offering to surrender?

The voice went on, "We must land rapidly to save our men. We shall turn on our entire visible spectrum and all our infrared radiation frequencies to guide you to us. We are putting ourselves in your power." There it was. And again, "Where shall we land?"

The radar operator said suddenly, "They've switched their beams on. There they are, a thousand miles up, two thousand miles north!"

Correll had a feeling that the plea for help was genuine, that there was no trap. But he kept silent. He was already under suspicion, and any advice he gave was sure to be disregarded, or at best regarded with distrust.

One of the Councilmen said finally, "We'd better take a chance. They're only a single ship, and we'll be wary about traps. And perhaps—if they aren't really hostile, they'll help us against the government ships."

The others nodded.

The radio operator said nervously, "Ship trying to make port. Come down to one hundred miles. Spaceport approximately two thousand miles south. Cruise slowly, while we keep track of you. Await further instructions."

CORRELL sat through the slow-moving drama of the next few hours in a fever of expectation. Something unexpected had happened to Pappas and his men in the ship. What could it have been? What had made them suddenly so meek, so anxious to land and surrender themselves? It could hardly have been a mere lack of supplies. If that had been all, they would have fought to the last man to take the supplies from those they regarded as their inferiors.

For the others, he knew, time passed more rapidly. They had reverted to their usual slow metabolic pace, and not till the ship was actually about to land would they take a new dose of the drug, to prepare themselves for any emergency.

The ship moved south, dropped in height. When it was only a hundred miles away, the port sent out a guiding beam. Now no more instructions were necessary. The ship had only to follow the beam to make a safe landing.

It was fifty miles away when Correll finally caught sight of it—a brightly glowing red speck against the colder, paler glow of Jupiter in the background. As the speaker had promised, all visible and infrared radiation had been turned on. The speck grew rapidly and became

a four hundred foot freighter. He and the others could see the braking rockets go on, they could watch the freighter come in for a landing.

As the ship settled down, the tenseness grew. Every large weapon in the colony had been brought to the spaceport, and was now directed at point blank range at the unresisting ship. Every individual was alert for the signs of treachery. Too alert, thought Correll. The most innocent motion might lead to a fatal fusillade.

The rocket exhaust dwindled, the waste gases floated away into the thin air. A door in the side of the ship opened.

A man stepped out. He walked slowly, like a dead man who resented dying. His eyes glittered, and his face was covered by a long black beard. He carried no weapons. His mouth opened, and the words ground out painfully, slowly, almost incomprehensibly.

"I am Pappas," said the man. "I—something has happened to me. You must help."

The others stared open-mouthed. Only Medlana thought quickly enough to recover from her daze and realize the truth. "He is one of us!" she cried. "He has become one of us!"

XV

HE HAD become one of them. The entire crew of the ship had become like the slow-moving individuals they had once scorned. They came out onto the ground of Ganymede, slow-moving, awkward, ill at ease. They did not know how to handle themselves in their newly acquired slowness.

Pappas said, in his painful way, "It was—difficult—to make—a landing. We—thought—we were—going to—crash. The controls—they were—not—made—for people—who move—slowly."

"And you had no robots on board, because you never thought you would need them," said Medlana.

"We never—expected—this."

Correll suggested, "Why not give him a whiff of Accelero? You'll find it much more convenient talking then."

Medlana nodded, and one of the others crushed a capsule of drug before the man's face. As if unaware that any change had occurred in his own metabolism, Pappas said, "We set out to conquer your colony. And we thought we had found the way to overcome the troubles with food and air."

"You used a decelerating drug?"

"We did better than that. We found a way to produce coma, and then to change back."

"You did what?" exclaimed Correll.

The other man stared at him. "It's simple enough. We produced coma, to reduce our metabolism to almost nothing, and live through the trip to Ganymede without exhausting our supplies. We had the automatic pilot take the ship from a little past Earth to a million miles from Ganymede. We set our compass by the light from Jupiter. Because of the fact that we didn't use up our supplies, we could plot a longer, indirect course that would permit us to come in to Ganymede from the side, and bypass any traps you had set for us. When we recovered later, we noticed, from our ship's automatic log, that there *had* been traps."

Medlana asked, "When did you come out of the coma? And how?"

"It was simple enough. When we reached a distance of a million miles, the combination of increased Jupiter light and the beginning of a noticeable gravitational pull tripped our revival mechanism. We set it by both light and gravity in order to avoid accidental awakening through approach to a large asteroid, or the sudden blazing of a nova. Revival was by injection of a previously prepared drug.

"At first we had the impression that we were covering the final distance between us and Ganymede at a hundred times the calculated speed. But after a time we realized that the ship's speed was normal, that we ourselves had

slowed down." He put his hand to his eyes. "It wasn't an easy fact to accept. When a member of my crew first suggested it, we refused to believe it possible. We thought that he had gone crazy. But no other answer to the problem existed.

"As we came closer to Jupiter, the gravitational field registered on our instruments as expected. But to our bodies the acceleration seemed enormous. The moment we moved, the gravitational pull on our muscles seemed a hundred times normal. From being ten times as fast as ordinary human beings, we had become one-tenth as fast.

"Our difficulty under gravity was the thing which finally convinced us of the truth. We knew then that we would never be able to fight off an attack. Moreover, there was no longer any reason for fighting." He smiled a grimace of a smile. It betrayed the humiliation he felt at having lost what he had so long regarded as his superiority. "We knew then that we had no choice then but to seek peace."

FOR A moment there was silence as they tried to realize the implications of what he had told them. Medlana said suddenly, "You became people like us. But can you change us into rapid people such as you were? Can you change yourselves back?"

"No," admitted Pappas. "That appears to be impossible."

"It isn't impossible at all," interrupted Correll. "Don't you see that this explains some of the events that have baffled us for so long? Those 'spies,' for instance—they weren't spies at all. They hadn't pretended to move slowly on the trip here. They were genuinely of your own type. Their low consumption of food on the trip proves that. They changed spontaneously, for reasons we have yet to learn, to other types."

He saw doubt in their eyes. "You don't believe it, because you've always been under the impression that an individual must be born as one type or

another, without being able to change. You've overlooked the tremendous influences for change involved in moving from one part of space to another—the differences in everything from the gravity and the radiation to which the body is exposed to the food that's eaten. These produce changes in human activity that can be striking and dramatic.

"Remember that first so-called 'spy'?" He changed suddenly into the R type, moving at about the same speed as Pappas could formerly attain. You were no more startled and frightened by the change than he was. It was a tremendous shock to his body, and he ran hysterically in a vain effort to escape it. Perhaps if both you and he had suspected the truth, you might have been able to save him. As it was, the sharp change in metabolism caused his death.

"As for the other 'spy,' the one who was a thief—he had changed from average speed to slow-moving, and then back again. In neither case was he aware of what had happened to him. He was unable to give a clear story, and you would have had reason to doubt him, whatever story he told. But one thing did emerge from his rambling account. The changes were connected with his moving from Mars to Earth, and then, later on, from Earth to Ganymede.

"It's likely that other changes of a similar nature have occurred among the general population, on Earth and Mars. You find a slow-moving individual, and you assume that he's been that way from birth. You may be right. But usually you don't have much evidence to prove it. And you overlook those cases where the change has occurred in the individual as a child, or even as an adult."

He stared at the group surrounding him. "Think back to your own personal histories. How many of you can recall whether you were born members of your group, or became as you are in infancy? Even fairly extensive records going far beyond your school years won't give the answer to that."

One of the men shook his head. "You are asking us to revise all our views as to our nature—"

"Because your views involve the confused and dangerous ideas that you're both superior and inferior at the same time. You're no better and no worse than the average human being. You're merely different. And the point I am making is that you are not as different as you had thought. Anyone will be able to become long-lived and slow moving like you. And you will be able to become as Pappas was, rapid, and short-lived.

"Your group has always been proud of the fact that it had a long-range view, that it wasn't deceived into overestimating the importance of minor details. Well, broaden your views a bit to go beyond yourselves. It is known that cold-blooded animals, for instance, have no definite body temperature for each type—and hence no definite length of life. Experiments made many centuries ago, as far back as the twentieth, showed that the metabolism and the length of life of a fruit fly, for instance, depended on the temperature at which the fly lived. A scientist by the name of Lowe—"

"Loeb," said one of the men ironically, aroused by the challenge to the broadness of his knowledge. "We are not as ignorant as you think."

"Thank you, you're quite right, it's Loeb. But you see the point. He raised the temperature ten degrees and multiplied the speed of living of the flies by a factor of two or three—at the same time cutting down the length of their lives by the same factor. And it has long been known that many cold-blooded animals can hibernate indefinitely—"

Someone broke in, "We are not cold-blooded, and the analogy with fruit-flies doesn't concern us."

"But the analogy with other hibernating animals does," insisted a girl whom Correll could barely glimpse at the edge of the group. "The point that Correll is making is that lower metabolism is the inevitable result—or the cause and the

result at the same time—of a fall in bodily temperature. Take a hibernating bear, for instance—or a sleeping human being."

A BABBLE of voices arose, and Correll had a feeling of satisfaction. He had helped break down the barrier to the new way of thinking. Now they were going ahead without him. And absorbed as they were in the scientific aspect of the argument, they would continue to go ahead—up to a certain point, where he had an idea that he would have to take over again, this time against greater opposition.

Someone was saying, "Very well, you claim that all these examples of other animals, cold-blooded or warm-blooded, mean nothing, that the only examples that count are those of human beings. Then I'll give you an example that goes back even beyond the experiments of Loeb. You have heard of the chain of mountains on Earth known as the Andes. I remember seeing them as I was coming in by spaceship. They're like a heavy backbone down the continent of South America."

"We are not interested in the metabolism of mountains," interrupted one girl sarcastically.

"But we are in the metabolism of the mountaineers. The Indians of the higher Andes, who had lived there for many centuries, had acquired a special metabolism of their own. They were adapted to the low temperatures and the low atmospheric pressure of their mountains. Their blood had an unusually high percentage of red corpuscles, and they lived in an environment which was almost intolerable for those not accustomed to it. At the same time, they were badly adapted to the oxygen-rich environment of the rest of Earth."

"That has nothing to do with Correll's argument that you don't have to be a member of one group from birth."

"It has everything to do with it. The fact is, that it seems to be possible to adapt to the environment of the Andes

either by long residence there—or by being born there. Whether the change is actually hereditary, in the sense of being handed down through the germ cell, we don't know. There may be a form of selection of those individuals who are best adapted to live there. Or the change may take place during the prenatal period, in the blood stream of the infant. It may even take place shortly after birth. But at any rate, there are people who are apparently born adapted, and others who have adapted later. Just as Correll has suggested may be the case with us."

Medlana said unexpectedly, "I don't doubt that the last speaker is correct. But this is no time to be discussing scientific problems. Have we forgotten that we stand in danger of invasion?"

"I haven't forgotten, Medlana," replied Correll. "But the fact is that the scientific problem is related to this danger of invasion. If there is no inseparable barrier between the different human types, what need to invade us at all? And what is there for us to defend?"

"We're not the invaders," shouted one man angrily. "Hjalmar is. Tell that to him."

"Exactly what I propose to do," said Correll coolly.

There was a moment of startled silence. Correll went on, before the babble of voices started again. "There's no point to fighting when it's clear that there's nothing to fight about. Let's contact Hjalmar and tell him that."

"And what if he doesn't believe us? What if he thinks it's a trap, as we thought Pappas's coming here was a trap?"

"Invite him to come down and see for himself..."

"But that—"

"That would mean surrender!"

"Surrender of what? Once people can change their types at will—and we obviously seem on the road to that—there is no need of separate defense organizations of the R group, or the slow-moving

group. There is nothing to surrender."

"You want us to give up everything we've worked for?"

"Not your home and your personal possessions, no. Not even the organization for governing your colony on Ganymede. But if you can change into my type and Hjalmar's and Pappas's, and we can change into yours—what is there to cling to? The idea that we're superior when we're in one form and inferior in another?" He turned to Pappas. "What do you have to cling to, Pappas? Do you still think you're superior?"

"We are human, no more."

"And you can use the help and cooperation of other human beings."

ONCE the idea had penetrated, thought Correll, there was nothing to argue about. One of the diehards objected, "You talk of changing from one form to another at will. But we still can't change from a slow form to a fast one."

"It happens in nature, and now that we know the possibilities, it won't be long before we can make it happen at will. Only an hour ago, we were still baffled by the problem of metabolic coma, just as not so long ago Pappas and his group were baffled by the problems of accelerant and decelerant drugs. Now we have the answer to our problem, as he has the answer to his."

They had the answer to the problem of coma. For the first time, the full personal meaning of the words he had uttered struck him. He had been thinking of what Pappas's news meant to the future of the colony here on Ganymede, and of the human race on the different planets. Tears came to his eyes now as he thought of what it would mean to his mother. She would arise from the living death which had gripped her for so many years, she would know him, and embrace him again. The dead weight of those oppressing years would be wiped out, they would live happily again.

The debate was still going on around

him, but he could sense the diminishing of antagonism. Those who still argued no longer hoped to convince others. They put up their last feeble objections only that they themselves might be convinced. As he had told himself, once the idea had penetrated, there was nothing to argue about.

"Let's try to contact Hjalmar now," suggested Medlana suddenly. "He may be closer to us than we think, and he doesn't have any idea of what has happened. We don't want him to attack before we talk to him."

There was a roar of approval, and Carroll relaxed. The desperate battle for which they had prepared so long and with such determination would not take place. The need for it had evaporated into the thin air of Ganymede.

It turned out that Hjalmar was no more than half a million miles away at the time. His first reaction to their proposal, as their reaction had been to that of Pappas, was one of suspicion. Even when they tried to make their sincerity evident by guiding him to the location of the colony and helping him to land, his suspicion remained. As his ship came in for a landing at the spaceport, alongside the ship that Pappas had brought down, they knew that the rest of his fleet hovered overhead, weapons ready—just as their own weapons had been—prepared to shoot at the first sign of what might seem to them to be treachery.

It had been Correll's suggestion to prepare a greeting that would confuse and startle Hjalmar, and blunt the edges of his suspicion by its very unexpectedness. There had been some opposition to it at first on the ground that it was beneath the colony's dignity. But the objectors had soon become convinced that the method would be effective, and help prevent any untoward incidents that might arise from the supersuspicious attitudes of the government men.

The door of the spaceship slid open, and two grim, armed men stepped out. At the moment, at a given signal, a

group of half a dozen robots burst into a quaint and ancient song, their high tenor voices blending in a perfect harmony that no mere human voices could match: "Hail the Conquering Hero Comes."

The two men in the lead stopped in amazement. The men behind them, stepping out of the ship, seemed confused. They looked back inquiringly, as if for orders. Hjalmar, his own broad face betraying his bewilderment, the very posture of his great body showing indecision, stepped out of the ship behind them.

Correll grinned at sight of him. Hjalmar was trying to be genuinely the conqueror, the grim military hero who has fought great odds and led his men to a glorious triumph. Unfortunately, there seemed to be no opposition over which to triumph. And while Hjalmar was still seeking it, Medlana and another girl— girl! thought Correll, she's more than two hundred years old— stepped up and presented Hjalmar with a bouquet of synthetically perfumed plastic flowers so well made that they appeared genuine.

The great conqueror's rout was complete. He flushed a deep red, and the pose of authority dropped away from him. He waved to someone in the ship, and other men came down after him, still confused by what had happened, but grinning as if not at all displeased.

Correll stepped up to him and said, "General Hjalmar, it is an honor and a pleasure to have you with us. I take pride in presenting you with the keys of the colony."

"Correll!" Hjalmar stared at him critically, in not too friendly a manner. "You don't seem to have suffered much from your kidnapping. You're going to have some explaining to do."

"I counted on doing some. Meanwhile, I'm curious to know how you managed to get here. No expedition of this size has ever before gone far beyond Mars."

HJALMAR smiled grimly. "We took a leaf from the book of your friends here. When we captured one of their

hideouts, we acquired a supply of the decelerant drug. We analyzed that, and learned to synthesize it. We used it to cut down the need for food and air during the long trip."

"You didn't keep your men under its influence continually?"

"Not continually. But for long periods."

"And there were no accidents?"

Hjalmar's eyes clouded. "One or two," he admitted. "One man went into a coma, from which we were unable to arouse him. And another remained decelerated. The drug seems to have had a permanent effect."

Correll said, "I had expected something of the sort. But come along now, General—"

Hjalmar flushed with anger. "Don't call me that!" he roared.

"I beg your pardon. At any rate, come along, and see the colony that you've conquered."

"My orders are to post guards here to keep order, and to send the ringleaders home. And you are going along with them, Correll, so an investigation of what you've been doing."

"I'll be glad to tell you all about my doings. Not that I mind returning to Mars, but there are a few things you had better know for your own good."

He described to Hjalmar what had occurred with Pappas. The burly giant grunted incredulously. "Are you trying to tell me that we've licked that problem too? We expected to have a difficult time cleaning up the R group."

"There's nothing to clean up. In a short time we'll be able to change ourselves into members of any group we want, at will. I admit that it will require additional research before we can make the changes comfortably, and in any direction we please, but now that we know the shifts are possible, it shouldn't take us too long to find out how to accomplish them."

Like shifting the gears of those ancient internal combustion engines."

"Exactly," nodded Correll. "Each hu-

man type can live under conditions that would kill the others. Keep an ordinary man at a temperature far above normal, and eventually he'll die of it. Fever weakens the body, and if continued long enough, can be fatal. But use the proper hormones on your feverish individual, and all the evidence is that he'll adjust to the higher temperature and change into the R type. Chill him down carefully, give him the proper decelerating hormone, and he'll change into the slow type."

Hjalmar said, "It's true that the R group has a higher body temperature than normal, and the decelerated group a lower temperature. But I wouldn't say that change in temperature causes the change in type."

"It's a combination of temperature and hormones—chemical gear shifters, you might call them. Sometimes, of course, the gear shifts take place in the body accidentally, without our having to take the drugs. And sometimes, too, the shift will take place into neutral, instead of into another gear—"

"You consider the coma state as neutral?"

"It's the closest condition to no motion at all. But the motor is still running."

Hjalmar laughed. "Why limit yourself to three gears? Why not go on to four, or five, or more?"

Correll didn't laugh. "Why not? In future we may be able to go on to these gears. At present we have to be cautious. We haven't acquired all the necessary skill in shifting, and in our carelessness and ignorance we're liable to grind and strip the gears, and that means to kill the patient. But we'll learn. And when we do—"

"Do you realize, Hjalmar, what we'll be able to do then? It'll be more than controlling our bodies. It will be like shifting the gears of time itself. We'll be able to speed up or slow down all the processes of the universe around us. Think of the new power for us."

"I'm wondering, Correll, how much

of an advantage that will be. When we speed up, we live faster. But we live a shorter time."

"We live a shorter time only by other people's standards. But even that will change. We're gradually learning to lengthen our lives, and with this to help us, we'll learn even faster."

"What I'm thinking of, though, is the new means we have of adapting to all sorts of situations that would formerly have defeated us. We can use each gear for special purposes. When an emergency occurs that calls for rapid action, we shift into one of the fast gears. When there's radioactivity, or high temperature, or high oxygen content to be resisted, we do the same."

"But the low gears may be even more useful. With only partial knowledge, you and your expedition were able to reach Ganymede. In future, we'll at last be able to think of conquering and colonizing Saturn and all the other planets that have so far been inaccessible to us. We'll be able to break out of our solar system and reach stellar systems that are, by ordinary time standards, many light-years away. We'll travel either in neutral or in some low gear. But we'll travel. There'll be no limits to our power."

"Don't get drunk with the thought of it," said Hjalmar dryly. "Personally, I've thought of one advantage of shifting gears that doesn't seem to have struck you."

"And that is?"

Hjalmar waved an arm at the watching colonists. That these men will at last be able to shave their beards."

Correll laughed. He had been carried away by the thoughts of the future. Human life would be infinitely more complex, but at the same time infinitely richer in possibilities. And there was one possibility which he could no longer postpone.

CORRELL sought Medlana, and found her nearby. The tension had gone out of her as well as out of everyone

else. Up above, Hjalmar's other ships were coming in for a landing, worried now only about crowding the spaceport, which had not been built to accomodate so many visitors. Jupiter was sailing across the sky, its satellites clustering around it as usual. Only slight traces of magnetic disturbances remained, to be seen in the flickering of short stabbing flames that rose occasionally from the surrounding peaks. All of Ganymede was returning to normalcy.

Medlana sighed. "We'll have to move everything back now from the mountains and set to work all over again. What trouble we might have saved ourselves if we had known!"

"We'll have to return our coma cases."

"Including Arwon. He'll be furious when he awakes and learns all that has happened while he's been unconscious."

"I have an idea," said Correll, "that he won't mind greatly. He'll be able to reconsider that decision he made some time ago. He'll be able to go back to that girl on Earth—or was it Mars?—with whom he was in love."

"That girl is a grandmother by now," smiled Medlana. "That was only five years ago by our old standards— but fifty years by hers and yours."

"Then he'll be able to fall in love with her granddaughter. Or someone else's granddaughter. Because by now it's very certain that it won't do him any good to be in love with you."

She said doubtfully, "I'm not so sure."

"I am. I decided long ago that you were going to marry me. And since we're no longer different human types, there's nothing to stand in our way. That was another advantage of our recent discoveries that I haven't bothered to explain to Hjalmar. But I thought of it while I was talking to him."

"You're still slow," she murmured. "Slower than I ever was. I thought of that ever so long ago, before his ship even landed."

"I may be slow," he conceded. "But I get there eventually."

He put his arms around her, and pulled her close, just as a sword of flame leaped up toward Jupiter from one of the mountain tops.

When she drew away, he smiled, and she said, "Well, of all the reactions to have! What do you think is so funny?"

"The idea that the electric disturbances on Ganymede are coming to an end. As I see it," he said, "They're just beginning."



Featured Next Issue

THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

A Brilliant Novel of a Waterless Earth

By SAM MERWIN, JR.



Herr Hetzl tinkered with Klugmeister

KLUGMEISTER

By MARSHALL ZASLOVE

*The Bahnmeister fulfilled
a lazy man's dream . . .
or was it a nightmare?*

HERR HETZL was a railway man. His father had been a railway man, too, as had his father's father and his father's father's father. So Herr Hetzl, true to the Hetzl tradition, was a railway man—a *Bahnmeister*, to be specific.

The duties of a *Bahnmeister* to the Third Reich consisted of inspecting the electrical connections on the block signal lines and reporting any breaks or malfunctioning to the signal tower in the nearby village of Diebedorf. Now, to most people this rather humdrum occupation might seem boring and monotonous. But Herr Hetzl was sublimely

happy. You see, Herr Hetzl had Klugmeister.

Klugmeister was a machine. At least, it was a machine *then*. It consisted mainly of a few hundred relays, vacuum tubes, condensers, and an evil-looking knife switch perched atop its cabinet that made it look like something swiped from a space opera. These components were arranged rather cleverly, so that the machine did a definite job.

At first this job was simple: to inspect the track electronically and sound the appropriate alarm in the Diebedorf switch tower when anything went wrong. To this end, a machine such as Herr Hetzl's was not only more convenient but actually more practical than its manual counterpart. Realizing this, the railroad line for which Herr Hetzl worked had ordered several such machines in 1939, but vacuum tubes did

better in V-2's, so they had resorted to *Bahnmeisters* instead.

But to return to the machine. As a simple robot, Klugmeister was completely practical. But Klugmeister did more than just ring a bell in at a maddening speed, eventually breaking the panes.

When the Allied bombing raids started, and Herr Hetzl put masking tape on his windows, the pane-breaking ceased, but the spectacle of fifteen windows flapping open and shut in complete unsynchronization was a rather sobering sight for trackside vagrants under the influence of intoxicating beverages.

NOW Herr Hetzl had absolutely nothing to do except to collect the food and sort it away. But even this was too much work for the lazy Herr Hetzl, so he built something else into Klugmeister. It was the central control for an automatic trackside collecting and sorting system.

Herr Hetzl dug a trench about ten feet deep on the right of way, then a tunnel from there to his pantry. In this tunnel he placed a conveyor belt that caught the cans as they fell.

In Hetzl's pantry were half-a-dozen strategically located home-made selenium electric eyes that sorted the containers according to size. All this had been effected in one short surge of inspiration, and Herr Hetzl still had almost a month before he could test it.

Three days later a B-17 crashed near Diebedorf, and Herr Hetzl was one of the first to scramble into the smoking fuselage. While the other villagers carted away seats, emergency rations, gas and oxygen tanks, our enterprising *Bahnmeister* deftly stripped the plane of its Norden bombsight, course correcting computer and some fifty feet of wire.

Then Herr Hetzl went home and had a ball. First he built an automatic mailing machine to pay his bills for him. This consisted of a large money holding rack perched above a smaller envelope holding rack. The correct amount of money was dropped into an envelope,

addressed and stamped, and sent on its way to a switch tower. For Herr Hetzl was a very lazy man. Living alone as he did, 2 kilometers from his nearest neighbor, Herr Hetzl was not bothered by the usual complications that beset the city dweller. And he loved it. In fact, he made himself even more isolated.

The meager salary that he drew as *Bahnmeister* was divided into two parts: half Herr Hetzl had sent to him by mail so that he could pay his water and light bills. The other half he turned over to Herr Schelling, his friend on the solitary train that passed Herr Hetzl's house once a month. With this money Herr Schelling bought such staples as concentrated milk, powdered eggs and canned meats. Once a month this food was dumped off the end of the speeding train, and Herr Hetzl spent the rest of the day picking up and sorting away the cans and boxes strewn over the right of way.

No one bothered him except by phone, and since Herr Hetzl's phone was a bit unpredictable when it came to putting calls through, the *Bahnmeister* was rarely disturbed. So Herr Hetzl ate and slept and tinkered with Klugmeister. And tinkered with Klugmeister.

He salvaged an old tape recorder, and hooked it up so that it answered the telephone, recorded messages, and answered the doorbell with the quaint phrase "*Herr Hetzl ist nicht zu Hause.*"

This worked so well, in fact, and caused the wanton frustration of so many would-be callers, that Herr Hetzl gleefully set to work building more such "work saving" attachments into Klugmeister. A small thermostat opened and closed the windows to keep an even temperature in the house, but when the outside temperature went above seventy-six degrees, a slight imperfection in the thermometer caused every window in the house to open and close to the mailbox in a pneumatic tube. To go along with this, Herr Hetzl built into Klugmeister a master time control that regulated every function of the ma-

chine. Every day it turned on Herr Hetzl's percolator, every week it seized and opened his pay envelope, depositing its contents in the mailing machine, every month it checked the meters and paid his light and water bills, and every year it sent out his sixty-five per cent income tax.

But this was still not enough for Herr Hetzl. Mailing letters and answering telephones was enough for ordinary robots, but not for Klugmeister. A confirmed cybernetician, he had his own ideas about the mental capacity of his machine—Klugmeister was going to *think*.

And think it did: a few minor adjustments in the computer relay circuits, a superimposition of the bombsight correlating matrix on this revised feedback system, and Klugmeister was doing some pretty remarkable things.

Two weeks later, Herr Hetzl found two dead cats in his pantry, so he decided to build a safety rail around the delivery chute. While doing so, he fell into the chute and broke his head on the treads of the moving belt. Presented with an object bigger than anything they had been designed to handle, the electric eyes went completely frantic,

blew six fuses, and stashed Herr Hetzl in a corner with two cans of sauerkraut and a broken beer bottle.

That was two years ago. Every day Herr Hetzl's coffee is brewed (but never drunk); every week his pay envelope (it's smaller now) is opened; every month the meters are checked and the light and water bills paid (the mailer has run out of envelopes and stamps and addresses the bills themselves), and every year Herr Hetzl's sixty-five per cent income tax is sent out (it's ninety-five per cent now, but no-one has noticed this thirty per cent discrepancy). The track is always checked, the telephone is always answered, and the number of trackside vagrants, along with the local feline population, has decreased sharply. The food sorter is working satisfactorily, even though the food bins are a bit full, and yesterday it knocked two men off the end of the caboose when it threw back a can of turtle soup.

And for two years no human being has set foot inside this house. So now—oh, I'm afraid I've confused you by saying that no human being has been in this house for two years.

Perhaps I should explain—you see, my name is Klugmeister.



If you hurry, you can still get your copy of the big 160-page

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The Satyr Strategem

They were just a
bunch of space-happy
Guardsmen, and
they'd never
had it so good

YOU remember the old *Priapus*? No? Before your time, I suppose. She was one of the Class F general purpose cruisers. When I was attached to her, just after I'd made warrant officer, she was part of the Westmark fleet. Back then, the Westmark was a lot more important than it is now, because everybody figured on an attack from the Andaman Powers, almost any day. So we spent our time scurrying around among the neutral systems in between, setting up trade alliances and renting

By **CHARLES
FOSTER**



Horigan was singing one of his ancient songs

bases, trying to build up our strength against the day when Andaman would strike.

The *Priapus* wasn't what you'd call a happy ship. For one thing, the region was full of barbaric and semi-civilized Orphan Systems—and the old Behaviour Code was in full force then. No drinking, no "unseemly or undignified actions before indigenous populations," and above all—nothing whatsoever to do with the local women. They threw enough conditioning at us to make it stick, even though we didn't like it. And another thing, the Old Man—Captain Ferris—didn't like his job one damn bit. He figured he was overripe for promotion and had been politicked out of it. What's more, he'd been yanked off a cruiser in the main battle fleet for this job. He felt at home out in space on battle maneuvers, but he was really out of his element when it came to negotiating with the indigenous populations, as the book calls them, in the Orphan Systems.

Not that he didn't do his job—just the opposite. Under his command, we dressed, slept and ate by the book. There were more inspections than you've ever seen on a training ship—by actual count. There was none of that easy-yet-disciplined informality that you usually get on a long space trip.

Well, we're two weeks out from Banning Base, on our latest errand, when the Exec calls all the officers into the captain's quarters. We file in, standing at attention before the Old Man's desk—the First and Second Engineers, First and Second Bridge Officers, the staff people, me, and the other warrant. He stares at us all for a full minute before he begins.

"Unlikely as it may seem to you gentlemen," he growls, "we are still part of the United Space Fleet. My inspection this watch indicates that some of you may have other opinions. If so, I'll be glad to listen to them now."

Of course, we all stood there silently, waiting for him to finish glowering at

us and begin ranting again.

"Mr. Lowry," he says, pointing a long bony finger at the Second Bridge, "am I correct in assuming you were exposed to a course concerning the Space Log while at the Academy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then perhaps you can explain why there is no listing of the ship's complement in your log for the last watch?"

"An oversight, sir."

"An oversight, I assure you, that will be entered in your performance file."

AND so it went, down the line. Anything, however unimportant, that varied by as much as a comma from the *Manual for Space Officers and Enlisted Men* was, to the captain, criminal neglect of duty and insubordination. He had worked right down to me when suddenly the alarm bell began to clang.

"Communications to Captain," the interphone squawked.

"Captain to Communications. Go ahead," he growled.

"Distress signal reported, sir. Azimuth 273 Inclination 17 Arc A38. Approximately point zero two parsecs."

"Type and registry of craft?"

"Unknown, sir. We receive nothing but the automatic signal."

The captain turned to us. "We will continue this later. Mr. Lowry, request clearance from Banning for change of course. Mr. Feinberg, plot a new course on the given, co-ordinates. He turned to me. "Mr. Mogrum, order the battle stations manned. Dismissed."

We were plenty glad to hurry off to our stations. Ordinarily, as you know, rescue work in space is a touchy, dangerous business. And out in the Westmark there was always the further danger of running into an Andaman ambush. But still, we all welcomed the diversion that got us off the Old Man's carpet. I kept busy the next couple of hours seeing that the gun crews were on their toes and that my rescue squad was set to go.

We dropped back into temporal drive, decelerated, and in a few minutes we

were orbiting about five kilometers from the wreck. It was an obsolescent L-Class, two man scout, converted for civilian use. A meteor had slapped into its stern, making so much junk out of the drive and the tubes.

The crew section still appeared space-tight, as far as we could see. But we couldn't raise a word from it—nothing but the same auto-signal, over and over. The gun crews stood ready on both sides of us as my five-man rescue crew entered the lock. We weren't taking chances—our ships had been captured more than once before by the Andaman and used for decoys.

The outer lock opened and I fed power to my scooter. As head of the detail, it was my job to go over first, alone. In the couple of minutes it took me to cover the distance, all alone in space, with the guns of my own ship at my back and dead silence up ahead, I wondered why I hadn't kept my rate, instead of passing the test for warrant. On this sort of deal you really earn the extra pay.

When I reached the little scout I tossed out the magnetic mooring and climbed over the hull to the lock. It looked workable, but before opening it I walked over the rest of the small hull, looking for leaks or for any sign of hostile activity, the way the book says. But there was absolutely nothing, one way or another. Even the ports were polarized opaque. Back at the lock, I radioed my squad to come ahead and I went to work on the manual controls. It took a touch of my torch to thaw them, but not much more than any ship in space requires. By the time the crew had reached me, I had it open. Cautiously, I swung inside the lock and gestured my men to follow. The grav unit was off, of course, with the main power wrecked, but everything else seemed to be functioning. My engineer rate tested the repressurizing pump. Even that was working. Whoever was inside was awfully lucky, considering that mass of twisted and fused metal that had been his stern.

THE inner door swung open. We waited, blasters ready. But the blasters were useless against what hit us! It was cacophonous, cracked and distorted, but it certainly was powerful. It went like this:

I saw a WRECK on the spaceways
But I NEVER heard NObody pray. . . .

The bodies all STREWN through the ether
But NEVER did NO-O-OObody pray!

And along with the off-key voice, a sort of random strumming from a guitar. The noise from the guitar didn't seem to have much of any relation to the noise from the voice. I put my blaster away and stepped through the lock into the cabin.

The chaplain was BU-U-R-RNed to a cinder
Burned up because NO-O-O-O-body prayed. . . .

He was all alone, stretched out on the acceleration couch. He had his space-suit on but the helmet was off, floating in the air beside him. Floating near the helmet was a space bottle of lethal stuff called "Auld Highland Blight—Scotch Type Whisky"—made illegal on Deneb Gamma and sold to spacemen with more credits than sense. The bottle was almost empty. He reached out for it and then he saw me, standing over him. He tossed the guitar aside and swung his short, stocky legs down to the floor. He ran a hand through his thatch of bright red hair and a grin broke out over his homely, freckled face.

"What do y'know! Jack Dalton to the rescue!" He gave himself a little push and floated over to me. Then he was pumping my hand. "Boy, you don't know how glad I am to see you! Here, have a drink." He shoved the bottle toward me. I certainly needed one after this little scene, but I remembered the Old Man and shook my head. He shrugged and sucked down the rest of the Highland Blight himself. He shuddered, tossed the bottle aside and staggered over to his helmet. He locked it down with agile fingers that seemed suddenly sober.

Before he locked the faceplate he turned, with a hint of a mock bow. "And now, my lad, let us pay our respects to your captain." He plucked the guitar out of the air and stepped over to the lock where the rest of my men were staring, open-mouthed. I thought of him and the captain together, and the thought made me gag worse than Auld Highland Blight would have.

We rode tandem back on my scooter. I was hoping to get him to sick bay before Captain Ferris could get a look at him, but when the inner lock opened, there was Ferris with the Exec, waiting to give what succor they could to the poor casualties.

Our "casualty" snapped off his helmet and gloves and shoved out a hand to the captain. The reek of Auld Highland Blight billowed out from the lock into the sterile, military corridor of the priapus and into the face of the Old Man. From his look you'd think he was being introduced to the lowest genus of rodent:

"Eternal gratitude, Chief. Honored be thy name. New laurels for the Space Fleet. Always get your man, or at least a ninety-eight point four probability of same." He pointed a stubby thumb at his own chest. "Mine's Red Horrigan. What's yours?"

The Old Man's bushy gray eyebrows almost met, and the grim lines about his mouth looked set in iron. He turned to me, and his tone seemed to indicate that this was all my fault.

"Sober this man up and bring him to my quarters." He strode off, at one hundred-thirty angry, regulation steps per minute.

In the ship's hospital, we shot a double dose of analcozine into Red Horrigan, but even so it took fifteen minutes to wring out the Highland Blight and get him somewhere near the Space Fleet Norm, chemically. Mentally, I didn't figure he'd ever come close.

WE RECORDED a preliminary brain-wave pattern for identification. Then he showered, I tossed him a spare

set of coveralls and we set off for the Old Man's quarters.

Horrigan chattered constantly to me on the way, and I couldn't help liking him. The satyric yet friendly glint in his green eyes may have had something to do with it, or the way the animated grin cracked across his pleasantly ugly face. You couldn't help liking a man like that, who seemed to enjoy living so much. Seems he'd come out from Sol during the Magellanic Revolt, in the Fleet. He'd got out of service as fast as he could after the fighting was over and had been trading since, mostly between the Orphan Systems, out here on the edge of the Westmark. He said he got more kick out of seeing the hundreds of different ways humans had developed on these isolated plants than he did from trading. But by then we were at the Old Man's door. . . .

My knock was answered by a growled command and we stepped inside. Naturally, I stood at attention. But Red Horrigan just stepped forward grinning, his hand outstretched.

Instead of taking his hand, Captain Ferris grimly thrust a typed sheet into it. "I assume you are aware, Mr. Horrigan," the Old Man intoned icily, "that the Fleet has jurisdiction over civilian craft in the entire Westmark sector?"

"Yep. That's what the signs say back at Banning Base."

"Then perhaps you grasp the significance of my report to the authorities, a copy of which I have given you, in accordance with regulations?"

Red Horrigan glanced down the typed sheet. His quick eyes skipped through the military verbiage to the gist of the report. "Intoxicated while operating a space vessel, thus endangering his vessel and vessels of the fleet," he read aloud. His eyes came up and met the captain's, unwaveringly. "That, Ferris, is a slight but important distortion of the facts. I was perfectly sober when my ship was operating. Disgustingly sober, you might say. Then, of course, when I was hit, about ten parsecs from the nearest space

line and out of radio range of anything except a random ship passing close enough to pick up my automatic, there was nothing to do but wait—for my air to give out. So—I figured I'd polish off the bottle before I was polished off myself."

The captain's face lost none of its grimness. "You are free to present your version to the Board of Inquiry. The Board will undoubtedly wish to know why your meteor screen was not operating."

Red Horrigan grinned triumphantly. "That's an easy one, Ferris. Your boys in supply back at Banning s'apped an emergency requisition on my micromass grid. In a month or so, they *hoped* they could replace it. I was free to sit on Banning till I went broke or to take a chance on the micromass. Being just a civilian Joe who has to work to live, I took the chance. And of course, I hit the jackpot—or it hit me. By courtesy of the Fleet, you might say."

That had gotten to the Old Man. He reddened slightly. It was well known, throughout the Westmark, that the Fleet often used its jurisdiction over civilian craft in ways that would not have been exactly approved back in the settled systems. Naturally, it kicked up a lot of resentment among the civilians and some of the Fleet men felt a little guilty about such procedures. But the Fleet had its reasons, too. "The protection of the United System comes before the interest of any individual," the captain explained sententiously. "The Fleet, as the only bulwark against Andaman, *must* take what it needs."

"Sure, Ferris. I've read the propaganda and poop-sheets too."

THE Old Man was having a hard time restraining his anger. But then, he'd been called "Sir" for so many years that it was a clear insult when he was called anything else, especially aboard his own ship. The veins along his temple stood out as he glared at Horrigan. "I don't need to remind you that this is a mili-

tary vessel, and that Fleet Regulations apply to you while on board!"

The captain turned to me. "This man was drunk when brought aboard?"

"Yes, sir." What could I say? The Old Man had seen it himself.

"That is a clear-cut violation of Regulation 137-A. See that this man is locked in the brig for the duration of our mission." He glanced at his desk chronometer. "And be back here at 1500. Meeting of all officers."

I left Red in the brig, strumming cheerfully on his guitar, and hurried back to the meeting. Most of the other officers were already there when I arrived. The captain had already begun talking as I slipped in. Surprisingly, he was not talking of the morning's inspection.

"... and we have now reached the co-ordinates specified for the opening of our orders." The captain slit the seals on the edges of a packet before him, unfolded the sheets and began to read:

TO COMMANDING OFFICER, PRIAPUS: PROCEED ALDEBARAN EPSILON. CONTACT REPRESENTATIVES INDIGENOUS POPULATION FOR TREATY TO MINE THORALITE AND TO ESTABLISH BASE CLASS D-3. THORALITE HAS SUPER PRIORITY AND IS ESSENTIAL REPEAT ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESS OF FLEET. IMPERATIVE THAT SUPPLY BE OBTAINED. TREAT INDIGENOUS POPULATION WITH UTMOST CARE. ALL BEHAVIOUR REGULATIONS APPLY. ONLY CONDITIONED PERSONNEL TO CONTACT POPULATION. END.

Captain Ferris didn't need to elaborate. We all knew how important Thor-alite was. All the new S-Class ships in the battlefleet needed Thor-alite as the catalyst for their drive. And it was that drive that might give us the edge over Andaman. With the S-type drive, we were fairly certain of holding on to the Westmark and protecting all the settled systems. Without it, we faced a losing battle. Andaman was our equal in technology and had a strong edge in manpower and fleetpower. But the joker was

that we just didn't have the supply fleet that was needed to bring the enormous quantities of Thorallite in across a hundred light-years from the known deposits in the settled systems. But now, with a source relatively close to the main Westmark base, our supply problem would be solved. That, by the way, had been the real reason supply had had to requisition Red Horrigan's macrogrid. With every available supply ship loaded with Thorallite, there just hadn't been room for other supplies, almost as essential.

The captain put the formal order aside and picked up the next sheet.

ETHNIC OUTLINE: ALDEBARAN
EPSILON: SECRET.

He looked from one to another of us and began reading again:

EARTH TYPE PLANET, ONLY INHABITED PLANET ALDEBARAN SYSTEM. ORPHAN PLANET, SETTLED BY HUMANS 1000 YEARS. ECONOMY SUBSISTENCE AGRICULTURE, HANDICRAFTS, MINOR TRADING. ARTIFACTS INCLUDE SOLID PROJECTILE WEAPONS, CRUDE BUT LETHAL. NO DATA AVAILABLE SEXUAL, MARITAL, RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS. AVOID ANY ASSOCIATION WITH NATIVE FEMALES UNTIL FURTHER ANTHROPOLOGICAL DATA COLLECTED. IMPERATIVE FULL BEHAVIOR CODE BE OBSERVED.

That was all, about as much as we usually had to work with. Nobody but GeoSurvey had hit the planet before us, and their main job was rocks, not people.

AS WE dropped back into temporal drive at the edge of the Aldebaran system, I was busy selecting the Honor Guard from among the men who would be free from other duties—jet fliers, high-drive men, cadets. As our ship slipped slowly through the outer atmosphere of the lushly green planet, I gave them a final inspection. Their working coveralls were gone and they sparkled in Guard uniforms—scarlet cloaks, powder blue tunics and trousers, high soft

leather boots. The ceremonial swords and spurs that had proven so impressive to the natives of other orphan systems glittered in the sunlight that shone through the port. I inspected the men carefully, but I couldn't find a thing to criticize. All of them—even my perpetually sloppy Blaster's Mate Third—seemed to realize the importance of our mission.

The ship settled into a grass-covered glade and gently came to rest. As soon as the green light from Atmospherics flashed on and the lock slid open, I brought the Honor Guard to attention and we marched in formation outside. Beside the ship we stood in the warm sunlight at rigid attention. No one was in sight. The foliage was thick at the edges of the clearing, but directly in front of us, a wide, grass-paved avenue ran back and disappeared over a gentle slope. It was lined with tall, elm-like trees, and their leaves barely rustled in the slight warm breeze.

And then I saw them! I almost gasped, in spite of my conditioning, and I heard a faint rustle run through the rigid ranks behind me. They appeared over the horizon, running toward us, between the tall elms, down the grassy avenue. Even at that distance, I could see that all of them were women. And their clothes! There was no single style, no predominating color. They ran in a wildly mixed yet blending kaleidoscope of hues and styles. Some wore brief, knee length togas, some were in shorts or slacks, some in diaphanous full length gowns, split along one leg to allow free motion. Red, blue, turquoise, magenta, shocking pink—and a dozen other colors. Sandals or bare feet. Hair upswept, down-thrust, cut short—all shades and styles.

The nearest and fleetest of them reached the edge of the clearing. She was tall and ash-blond and the sun flashed through the flimsy net material of her toga, showing her firm skin, evenly tanned. I was in the regulation position, of course, for the Chief of the

Honor Guard, sixteen paces in advance of the Guard. She saw me standing alone and ran towards me. Just in front of me she stopped, looking directly into my eyes. She was almost my height. In her left hand she held a great orchid-like flower, purple, shot with streaks of red and yellow.

She regarded me a moment, calmly, and then she spoke. Her voice was soft and low, with a funny little trill in it, but she spoke in Universal!

"This *Millya* budded in the swamp—with hope. Grew toward the Light—with hope. With hope I plucked it this day, when we knew your great ship would come. Now, joyfully and with hope, I offer it to you."

BELIEVE me, I was confused. Our conditioning, all in line with the Behaviour Code, made us avoid indigenous females on the Orphan Planets. And it was right, too. Never could tell what reaction any gesture—an ordinary, friendly gesture—would produce. But also we were conditioned to greet the representatives of a world with good will and friendliness. But here, all the representatives we had seen were women! And while she had been talking to me, the others had run on past us.

Now they were among my Guard, all of them talking in Universal. I glanced over my shoulder and saw that the conditioning was being subjected to a real strain. I turned back, not knowing just what to say or do.

As I did, she stepped even closer to me and deftly slipped the flower between my ear and the golden helmet of the Guard.

She whispered, "I am Milani and I knew the other men who came from the stars and worked so oddly with our rocks. They promised when they left that others would come after them. Now it is true—you have come and I am yours."

I must have smiled then. Probably I was grinning foolishly. At any rate, the next thing I knew, I was in her arms

and she was kissing me. I felt her long firm body tight against mine, felt my conditioning evaporate, forgot the Behaviour Code, and then . . .

"You men are under arrest!"

I twisted from her arms and spun around. Captain Ferris was standing at the lock, in the full uniform of a Commander of the Honor Guard, with the wierd antennae sprouts of a transliterator helmet on his head. He stood, tall and military and as mad as seven Dench sloughs.

"Return to the ship at once! You are all guilty of violation of the Behaviour Code. The Admirals' Court at Benning will deal with this! Report to the brig!"

I looked around. My twenty Guards were all trying to return to some sort of military bearing, but this seemed difficult because each of them had at least one girl in his arms. And each had at least one *Millya* foolishly poking out between his helmet and his ear. Shamefacedly, we turned back to the ship. As the first man started in the lock, the captain's voice boomed out again, amplified by his transliterator.

"Throw down those plants! They may be poison!"

Each man of the dishonored Honor Guard dropped his as he reached the lock. Some hesitated a moment, then dropped the *Millya* reluctantly. I know I did.

It was called the "brig" but it was really part of the ship's hospital and was used mainly for cases of space cafard. It was designed for six men. With twenty-one of us milling in the room, there was some confusion. I did manage to catch a glimpse of Red Horrikan, grinning at me from a lower bunk, near the door. Then I pushed through the men to the port. Through it I could see Captain Ferris, surrounded by the girls of Aldebaran Epsilon. He must have had the amplifier of the transliterator turned way up, because I could make out his words, conducted through the metal of the hull.

"We come to you in peace," he was

shouting, his voice still filled with anger. "The men who molested you will be punished severely. I promise that no one of my crew will touch any of you again. We wish only to make a trade agreement for our mutual benefit. Go and tell your leaders that we would discuss this with them."

The captain turned to enter the lock. The girls watched him silently for a moment. Then they turned and started slowly back across the clearing.

NO SOONER had the girls disappeared among the foliage than men came in sight—fifteen of them. But the men did not carry the bright blossoms of *Ilithya*—they had spears and crossbows and a few of them carried primitive solid-projectile rifles. Fifty meters from the ship they stopped, stolidly regarding the ship and holding their weapons in readiness. They waited. Then the captain reappeared on the ground beneath my port, flanked by the Exec and Lieutenant Feinberg. The three marched steadily towards the armed men till they had covered half the distance. Then Captain Ferris gestured the other two to halt and he went on alone, back and head erect, his cloak rustling slightly as he marched. Whatever the Old Man may have lacked, it wasn't courage.

Plenty of courage—but diplomacy? He had reached the group and was talking to them now. But as he talked, the knot of men stirred restlessly, angrily.

One of them shook his spear above his head. Then others were waving spears, fingering releases on their crossbows. Two with rifles, half-crouching, advanced toward the captain, gesturing angrily. One shoved him roughly on the shoulder. The captain stumbled, recovered himself, turned with dignity and marched back to his aides. In formation the three marched back to the ship. The natives remained watching in silence until the captain had entered the lock. Then they turned and disappeared in the foliage at the edge of the clearing.

Hardly had I turned back from the

port when the Exec was at the entrance to the brig. "Attention!"

As we snapped to rigid attention, the captain strode in. Purple anger diffused across the set muscles of his hard lean face. His jaw quivered.

"You men," he barked, "will be held for the Admiral's Court. I do not know what their decision will be, but do not expect leniency. You have utterly ruined the chances for success of this expedition. You have destroyed our single chance for getting a close source of Thorallite." He looked stonily from one rigid face to another. "Whatever they do to you will not be enough to repay what you have done to the Fleet—and to the United Systems."

I realized only too well what they could do. We'd be broken, of course and cashiered out, probably imprisoned. Or worse? They'd always been rough on violators of the Behaviour Code, and the effects of this violation were more serious than any other I'd heard about. I had to say something.

"Sir, the men were not to blame. As officer in charge the blame was mine. But the women approached us. We didn't go to them. It was entirely on their initiative, sir."

He glared at me in silence for a moment. Then he said, coldly, "As officer in charge, Mogrum, your penalty will undoubtedly be the most severe. But that does not excuse the others. Whether the women approached you or not makes no difference. They may have been testing us. I tried to apologize for your conduct and to assure the natives that such an occurrence would never take place again. But the damage was done. Even as I talked they became more angry and finally they threatened to kill any man who left the ship."

The captain turned back to the door, surveying with cold rage the rigid faces of the men. Suddenly he whirled and barked at me. "Where's Horrigan?"

I looked rapidly around the room, but Horrigan's red hair was nowhere in sight. "I-I don't know, sir. He was here

when we came in, but he seems to have disappeared."

"It seems he has," said the captain scornfully, "and as officer in charge . . ." he caught himself. After all, I was just another prisoner now. He turned to the Exec. "General Alarm. Close all locks and hatches. Order a general search of the ship. I don't see how the situation can get worse, but if that drunken space-bum gets out he'll find a way to make it worse."

AS THE captain strode out, alarm bells began to sound. Signal lights flashed and armed search parties passed back and forth before our door and through the ship. The search went on—ten, fifteen, twenty minutes. It shouldn't have. You see, a search is all planned out in advance. Standard Operating Procedure. We knew every place that a man could possibly hide, and they were all locked off while the search parties went methodically from one to another. In seven and a half minutes, the man had been found—or he wasn't on the ship.

But the captain ran the search three times before he gave up. Then he was back at the brig. "Horrigan is gone—off the ship," he announced, as all of us already knew. He turned to me. "And it seems you have all the jetmen here."

"Yes sir. When I formed my detail they had no other duties."

"You and the jetmen are temporarily restored to duty. Horrigan must be found. If he is allowed to remain here, any possible chance of establishing relations with the natives will be gone. Find him and return him—alive, if possible. But do not hesitate to shoot, if necessary. If you are successful, I will recommend mercy to the Court."

"Yes, sir." I turned to the three men who had been checked out on the new X-3 jetfliers. "Williams, Steiner, Naguchi—let's go. We'll plan our search patterns in the launching room."

I took the zero to two-seventy quadrant myself, assigned quadrants to the

other three, and ordered an expending arc pattern of search, tree-top level. It would be rough, I knew, because the only data we had to load in the "bloodhounds" was the preliminary brain-wave pattern we'd taken as standard procedure when Red Horrigan was brought aboard. A really accurate pattern has to be averaged over several days—and his was badly distorted from the liquor he'd imbibed when we brought him in.

I catapulted out first, and circled till the other X-3's were in the air. Then I started out, flying in ever-increasing arcs, covering every meter of my quadrant. The country was pleasant and rolling. It was late spring and there were green growing crops in many of the fields. The houses I passed were simple structures with thatched roofs. They were widely separated, in the midst of their fields, with great stands of timber between each farm. I saw many women near the houses and working in the fields. Only a few men were in sight. Were the men already assembling to attack us?

I'd reached the outer perimeter of our search, at a radius of twenty kilometers from the ship. The sun was near the horizon and the tall trees threw great shadows across the fields they surrounded. Still there had been no result from the "bloodhounds." And just fuel enough left for a straight return back to the ship. Oh well, maybe they'd only break me back to Third Blaster. More headaches than it was worth, being a war-rant.

The planet's bright moon had risen and I was just three kilometers from the ship when the red light on the "hound" flashed on and it began to click. I veered off to the right. The clicking grew fainter and stopped. I circled back to the left and in a moment the clicking picked up again. In a few seconds it hit max and started back down. I circled back to max, hovered, and picked up a radar picture of the ground below. I was over an open clearing and the radar showed

a number of figures moving below. I let down.

As the jet settled gently in the moonlit clearing, I wondered why the "hound" had not picked up Red Horrigan before, when I'd passed over this area on the way out. He certainly couldn't have moved very far on foot in the time he'd had. But as I stepped out of the jet, I saw why. He was drunk—gloriously drunk! I'd picked up the same patterns that we'd recorded when we brought him aboard. And he wasn't alone. One of the slim, tall girls we'd seen before was on his lap, and others were sitting around him. And he was singing another of his ancient songs in his cracked, off-key voice:

Oh my father was the keeper of the Eddy-
stone Light
And he slept with a mermaid one fine
night
From this union there came three—
A porgy and a porpoise and the third was
me!

The girls seemed to love it. I guessed that music hadn't developed very far on this planet.

HORRIGAN broke off as he saw me approaching, patted the girl absently on her smooth cheek and casually pushed her to her feet. Then he stood up, a little unsteadily.

"Why, Mogrum! How did you break out of the can? I didn't think you had it in you, old man! But come on over and join us. Plenty of everything to go round . . . more than enough . . . come on!"

He came toward me, staggering a little. The girls were just behind him, watching us.

In the moonlight I saw that one of them, a little apart from the rest, was Illani. Her lips were parted in a half-smile and there was invitation in her eyes. For an instant I had a wild impulse to follow Red Horrigan, to drink with him, to feel Illani's arms around me again. But then, just as suddenly, the impulse died. For, behind him and

over to his left, men were approaching, a ragged angry knot of them, bows and rifles ready. I dashed over and grabbed him roughly. "Come on, you fool! They'll be on us in a minute."

"Why sure, Mogrum." He took another uncertain step, then half-fell towards me. Then I felt his left leg suddenly hook in back of mine and he shoved violently against my chest. I was down and he dropped after me, knocking my gun away as I brought it up. I fought him off but before I could get up rough hands pulled at my shoulders, my arms, my head. I was pinned, and the crossbows and rifles glittered in the moonlight, all aimed at me. There were confused mutterings all around me. Then I heard a gentle liquid voice—Illani. Then another louder commanding voice in the native language:

"*Lyzim!*"

I tensed, waiting for the flash from the guns, the end. But nothing happened for an instant. Then—then they were letting me up! They were *helping* me up. Illani was by my side regarding me anxiously. And Horrigan was standing among them, slapping one man on the back familiarly.

He stepped over to me. "S'all O.K., Mogrum, all O.K. Trouble was, they thought you were acting like Captain Ferris. Illani and I explained you weren't."

"Acting like the captain. What in hell do you mean?"

"Tell you all about it—fix up everything—'les go back." He slung an arm across my shoulder and we started to walk back to the flier, but suddenly he stopped. "I'm real sorry, Mogrum, about you gettin' roughed up like you did—but I wasn't sure you'd give me a chance to pick up this," and he waved a sheet of native parchment in my face.

"Very interesting—but what is it?"

"Tell you on the way back."

It was only a minute or two later that we were hovering over the open launching chamber, but that was time enough for Red to give me the gist of his story.

At first I thought he was crazy—or crazy-drunk—then I wasn't so sure. By the time I had the little flier cradled, he'd convinced me that all the rest of us had been crazy.

I checked to see that the other three jets were in O.K. and then both of us started down to the captain's quarters. Our arrival had flashed down the intercom ahead of us and Captain Ferris was out in the companionway to meet us.

"Good work, Mogrum," he growled. "I'll see they go easy on you for this."

"Easy, nothing, Ferris," Red broke in, "he gets a medal."

The captain looked over Red coldly, as though he were a hunk of more than somewhat spoiled Dubhe beef. "Your drunkenness now just adds another charge against you. That's—let's see—thirteen, so far." The captain turned to me. "Take him to the brig and cuff him in, this time."

Captain Ferris turned on his heel and started back to his room. Red Horrigan just stood there, grinning. It was too much for me. I started after Ferris, shouting, "We've got it! We've got it!"

He turned back. "Got what?"

"The agreement. The trade agreement. And we can have bases if we want them!"

Horrigan was laughing now, but he stopped long enough to say, "Correction, Captain Ferris. I have the agreement. Wanna talk about it?"

Ferris stared at us both for a moment. Finally he snapped, "Come into my cabin."

Ferris dropped into his chair behind the great desk and looked up. "Well?"

RED slung one leg insolently across the edge of the desk and flicked the heavy parchment over to Ferris. "Read it and rejoice," he said. He leaned over and stuck a stubby, freckled, dirty finger on one of the paragraphs. "But please note it says here that Horrigan—that's me—will have a monopoly of all, any, and sundry mineral deposits on this planet for fifty years. So now, Cap-

tain, your problem is a lot simpler. All you got to do is negotiate with me.

Ferris read over the sheet carefully, noticing the seals and signatures at the bottom. Finally he looked up. "How—how did you do it?"

"Trade secrets," Red said with an indulgent smile, "I can now afford to give away." He poked into the captain's humidor and pulled out a blue Venusian cigar. After he had it lighted he went on. "You see, I've knocked around the Orphan Systems long enough to know you can't follow a book—or at least not any one book I've seen. Conditions are too different. Funny things have happened on some of these planets. And then too, I've read a little history, just to pass the time in space, about how these systems were settled. And I happened to remember that Aldebaran was settled by religious refugees, just before the big Atomic Scourge—must be a thousand years ago—mostly from a place called Carolina-Georgia, in what used to be United North America. These folks had a lot of queer ways. Believed in strict monogamy, for instance—didn't believe in making a sign to something called a "flag"—and also didn't believe in military service. So back in those first days of star travel—when it took forty, fifty years to get where you planned to go—providing you got there at all—they sold all their farms and livestock and such and got up a subscription to buy a star ship. And we're only the second ship to visit them since they got here, a thousand years ago. The other was the geosurvey crew."

The Old Man snorted. "Just what," he demanded, "does this thousand-year-old fairy tale have to do with us?"

Red puffed on the cigar, then flipped the ash in the general direction of the captain's desk converter. "Just background, Ferris—just build-up. But the background really got 'em into trouble here. You see, while they were strict monogamists, they were also good healthy specimens, so they carried along

an equal number of men and women on their star-trip. Well and good, if somewhat uninteresting. But when they got here, something *happened*. I'm not the man to say just what caused it. Could have been ground radiations, something from the sun, the diet, impurities in the water supply, maybe an air-borne virus. . . ."

Ferris was practically bouncing with impatience. "Never mind the theories, man! What happened?"

Red grinned. "Mutation."

"Mutation!" the captain screamed.

did result in certain changes in their outlook."

"Red," I said, "you'd better come to the point." The Old Man was getting dangerously purple again.

"Okay. Well, this was a sort of progressive mutation in just one gene of each chromosome, and it affected a large percentage of the population in each generation. The result? Well, they just started having a lot more girl babies than boy babies!"

The captain was silent for a moment, brooding. "Yes, perhaps you're right.

They Wore Wings and Halos—and Any Resemblance to the Angels Ended Right There!



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"What kind? I saw nothing at all abnormal!"

"Yes you did, and your men did too—especially those in the fliers. But I fear you were all a mite too regulation-bound to figure it."

"Ridiculous. Physically, they were completely normal. Excellent—uh—specimens. Do you mean—a mental change?"

Red laughed. "No, not exactly. But it

I do remember seeing more women than men here. But what about this religion you spoke of? What does that have to do with this?"

"Well, all of them believed in it pretty strongly. They had at least two religious meetings every seven days, and sometimes they'd have seven. Called it a "revival." But with more and more healthy, good-looking girls coming along every year, their faith in monogamy sort

of began to die out. And along with it, their preachers—that's what they call them—preachers—their preachers began to lose their hold over them. Fewer of the folks in the parish were showing up for hymn singing, and a lot of the younger ones were living in bigamy, or sin, or something. So finally things got so bad that the preachers all met together and decided that the one true and holy marriage henceforth would be bi-gonamy."

The captain was interested now, in spite of himself. "Well, didn't that settle things? Took care of the excess woman problem, didn't it?"

"Not quite. Because, as I said, this was a progressive mutation. It kept getting worse. Back then, when they proclaimed bi-gonamy, the ratio was around two girls born to one boy. But it kept creeping up. After a while, a few hundred years I'd say, it passed three to one. Then the preachers had to decree that tri-gonamy was the only proper form of marriage. And now—well, the ratio is just a few points below four to one, and nobody's happy. A lot of the girls can't find husbands. The husbands have just about as many wives as they can manage now, though as I said they're mostly good healthy specimens. And the head preacher told me that if they go on changing the brand of holy matrimony, no one is going to have faith in *anything* any more."

"I can see how it might be a problem," the captain observed, "but how did this help you get an assignment on their mineral resources?"

"Hell, Ferris, that was the easiest

part! I just let them know that with the mines working and space ships arriving every few days, there'd be a lot of males pouring in. And—oh yes—I told them that there was a pretty good chance our genetic engineers could straighten out their birth ratio."

The captain brightened. "Of course. Put technics to work on it and they'll have an answer soon. They always do."

"Yeah, but this is a little different. They want to stick to the ratio of three to one, now that tri-gonamy is the proper, sacred form of marriage."

The captain looked a little doubtful. "Well, I suppose they can do it. But what, Mr. Horrigan, do you want for your contract?"

"Oh, a new ship, first of all. *With* a macromass grid. Immunity from requisition. And maybe a holding or two here, reserved for me. Tri-gonamy sort of intrigues me."

So—everything more or less worked out. The captain completed his mission and got promoted to commodore. The regulations were changed so that ships like ours had to carry an anthropologist, at least as good as Red. I was not only exonerated but also promoted. Next leave I had I took a trip back to Aldebaran.

Took quite a bit of persuasion to bring Illani around to the idea of monogamy, but she finally agreed and we went back to Banning together. That was eight years ago.

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"I am taking
control of your
ship, Captain!"



MILK RUN

By **FOX B. HOLDEN**

The service had a motto: Mars or bust . . .

IF YOU'RE fool enough to give the Space brass any back-talk—even when it's through all the prescribed channels and you use only the words the book says you can—they find ways of getting even. Not, you understand, that a captain's officers are ever assigned to

him on any but the most impersonal, business-like basis. Not much.

First Officer Sturgess, I figured, was to be my spanking. At least that was the way I had it added up when the milk-run started, and when it started, I had made up my mind to let it go at that.

What Sturgess had on his record would be his own punishment for as long as he lived, and brass be damned if I was going to let it punish me. Even though I was the fair-haired cadet those twenty years ago who had turned him in. No, he wouldn't have forgotten. And right now the brass wasn't forgetting, either.

The milk run was at the bottom of it of course—it's the bottom of everything, and that's what I told the brass when they put me back on it for another hitch. The assignment order was plastered with a lot of nice words like "maximum efficiency" and "commendable command ability and discipline" but I wasn't having any—not any longer, and I told them that, too.

"You may resign if you wish, Captain Logan," they told me. "But—unfortunately, there are no exploration commands available at present. It is strongly urged that you give further consideration to such a step. In view of your retirement status—" and that's how it went. The milk run. Stuck with it, and stuck with Sturgess to boot. All for a bunch of boobs who get the urge to be pioneers about two hundred years too late. Every trip, five thousand new ones, "Mars or bust" written all over their faces in one way or another. I suppose a fair percentage of them are always sincere enough about the colonization angle—the "bright new world" routine—but only a few, the way I saw it. And the rest? God only knew. But there's always a full five hundred of 'em, every trip. . . .

EARTH to Mars, Mars to Earth—it's simple enough when you look at it that way. Every other captain in the service carries a hull full of nice, manageable exploration gear, maintenance equipment or at the worst just general supplies to a million places in Deep Space where things worth a man's while are going on. But on the milk run you've got a cargo of everything from frustrated dime-store salesgirls to tired ex-

newsmen with ulcers, and you have to wet-nurse 'em for ten months at a stretch, for only forty million miles.

Mars or bust. Come hell or damnation—your job: Get 'em there.

Sturgess buzzed me in the bank room and I pressed a sono-switch that would unlock the hatch and let him in. My second officer—young Adrian—had the main control bank and things were running pretty smoothly all things considered, so I had the time if not the inclination to see what Sturgess was after. Putting him in charge of my stewards had seemed the best way to keep him out of trouble, but then, with five thousand human beings in any kind of close proximity, you never can tell.

"Report for the third week, sir." He still looked like a cadet of seventeen to me—maybe some people would take him for his middle twenties, but not anyway for a guy pushing forty. There was still that just-scrubbed face look about him—that bright-eyed look that went more with fuzzy cheeks than with the just-visible, tight little wrinkles at the edges of the thin-lipped mouth, and the slender leanness of body that belies a lot of time on space-decks. Steady, cold blue eyes—they'd look straight inside you, and the brain behind them would know every time you'd pulled a boner. And you had the feeling that it laughed silently, telling itself how damn ridiculous people are who always stick with the regulations. A troublesome, rebellious brain that liked people too well and had an undefinable contempt for the laws they made.

And to Sturgess I wasn't a person. I was a law.

I took the report from him and kept him standing there at attention while I scanned through it. Neat. Orderly. Defiantly perfect. It was Sturgess to the letter.

"Did you check this group in Section 83-L with Registration?"

"Which group is that, sir?"

"Smith, Jones, Brown, Edwards . . . all of the men who are in the thirty to

thirty-five age group. All together."

"No sir. There seems to be no more than the median index of restlessness for eighty-seven percent of the group, with the remaining thirteen percent pretty much split but falling well inside safety margin. I—"

"Occur to you that you've got five thousand people out there—all kinds of crazy people who are running away from Earth for one reason or another—money, business, politics or what-have-you—and for every one there's always some half-baked motive cooking to do God know—what? That's a group of names there, Sturgess. Common names. Too common to be all together that way. Smith, Jones, Brown. . . ."

"There's no departure from behavior expectancy statistics. I've checked carefully. Each file's been run through the machines twice."

"You just do what I tell you. Keep an eye on that section."

"I'll record them and do their psychomet analyses personally, sir."

"All right, see that you do. Now how about 43-M?"

"Just youngsters, sir. They—"

"Cut the goddam excuses! You know the rules in Space, Sturgess! Ship's surgeons'll have plenty of important things to keep 'em busy when these people get their first taste of the sickness—those kids'll have all the time they need for that kind of monkey business when they get where they're going. See that they stay in their compartments where they belong. Separately!"

"Yes sir."

I kept going through the thing page by page, laying it on good, but it was actually as Sturgess had said. Nothing really out of line. Nothing I wouldn't have let pass if the first officer had been anybody but Sturgess. As long as comparative statistics said the round pegs were in the round holes I didn't give a damn. When they started in acting as though they were home on Earth I got tough, but most of 'em usually stayed where they belonged and kept quiet, and

the stat-checks kept me on top of the heap. But you never can tell when some screwy idea is getting ready to pop—and if the milk run ever has anything, it has a pot-full of screwy ideas. And when they begin to pop their seams, it shows on the stat sheets, and the stewards get busy. On some trips they're always busy. On most they're just along for the ride. But you never can tell, and I've never tried to. I know better.

"This one who just keeps watching through the port all the time. Get him away from it."

"That would be the philosopher chap. He's quite happy that way—"

"I said get him away from it. I don't care if he's happy or dead. I just want him to keep all his marbles till we tie up. Keep that in mind about all of 'em. O.K. you're excused, Sturgess. And it's a fair report."

"Yes sir."

He turned, hesitated, then turned back to me.

"Captain Logan."

"I'm busy, Sturgess."

"I think you can spare me a moment, Captain." Those eyes of his bored into me, maybe looking for a conscience. I looked back into his and they stopped me cold. "You haven't asked to examine my honorable reinstatement papers, Captain, and I've brought them with me. There is a regulation, you know. I have to show them to you." He handed me a long plastic envelope, and I took it, opened it. I scanned the contents, and everything was there. . . .

A brief outline of the cadet incident, the way Sturgess had gone against my orders when I'd been the cadet officer of the day, and the way I'd had him bounced from the Academy.

IN SMALL type it told about the two hundred men on the training mission outside Pluto, and how a stray meteor had slipped our screens and caught us with our pants down. It told in detail about what happened to our oxygen and fuel supply, and how half the two

hundred could have been brought back safely if the other half were sacrificed. It quoted my order to Sturgess as second in command, and described the way he'd walloped me with the butt of an R-gun and then tried to save the whole shebang.

Sturgess lost all except a handful of men including the two of us who made it back, and I saw to it that he got the boot. The Academy had to see it my way—one hundred men alive are better than two hundred dead.

But—and now the papers switched to bigger print—upon consideration of his appeal and the "admittedly commendable, if misguided, motives which caused Cadet Sturgess to act against his orders as herein brought forth," he had been, after a five-year suspension, awarded a reinstatement. It said in bigger print yet that all commanders were supposed to "be thus advised, and be duly made aware" of Sturgess' readmission to the service, with full commission, on honorable status.

That was the story, and I knew Sturgess would have pushed the damn envelope in my face regulations or not. He wanted to watch me squirm. Me, you see—the law.

I handed the stuff back to him.

"All you have to do is remember who's captain," I told him, and turned back to the main control bank.

STURGESS remembered. Scrupulously. If there was some seething resentment smouldering underneath that cold-eyed mask of his it was either perfectly disguised or I was imagining it. He was behaving like a first-class automaton—it was like feeding orders into a battery of the machines and having them executed exactly as they had been fed, no more, no less. I didn't get it at first, but there wasn't time to worry about it. The way it added up to me was that instead of finding a time-bomb planted under my pillow I was finding a busted rebel instead. "Yes sir, no sir" was all the cold-eyed mask would say,

and that's just the way I wanted it.

We got through the sickness all right. In fact, better than on most trips. Only about half came down with it, and only about twenty percent of them had it bad, so I was without the usual overcrowded ship's hospital headache. The chief ship's surgeon told me that space-sick preventatives were getting better all the time, just the way my second officer tried to make me believe that these colonizers were getting more serious all the time.

Adrian was a youngster and still believed all the stuff they'd taught him in his humanities term at the Academy. He was a bright young kid and I liked him. You know the type—well-educated, eager to make the grade, high-minded and all ready to give the universe a whirl on its major axis.

"Sir, I'm not exactly sure I agree with you," he told me. "I think the *Conestoga* and her passengers are pretty important. That's why I signed on her."

We were about half-way out, the sickness had been taken care of as I said, and there wasn't a hell of a lot to do until we crossed approach ecliptic in a month or so. Our engines were damped down to a half, and we were on the part of the trip where if anything is going to be serene at all, this was it. I had talked to Adrian between the routine duties before, and I guess I did get sort of a kick out of listening to him. Took me back twenty years.

"Think it's pretty important, do you?"

"Yes sir, I do. Look through the port, sir, and maybe you'll see what I mean." So serious, these kids. I'd seen more Space in the last two years than he had in all his life. "It's big, Captain Logan—awful damn big. It makes an ocean look like a—a saucer with spilled tea in it. The *Conestoga* makes one of the old sailing ships look like a child's toy in a bathtub. Out there you can go in any direction for all eternity, and travel what might as well be an inch or so. . . ."

"You'll be star-happy before you know it, young fella!"

"No, but you get me, don't you, Captain? We've learned how to build ships that really amount to something. We aren't tied down any longer to just one of those millions of tiny bright lights out there . . . we can get to any of 'em—all of 'em, if we want—"

I DECIDED to change the subject because he was beginning to get at me where it hurt. I knew we could get to "any of 'em, all of 'em" if we wanted. "We" meaning other guys. But not Logan. I was just as trapped as if I'd been pushing one of those water-going barges Adrian talked about.

"Sure," I said. "But you're on the milk run, sonny." Instead of shutting him up, it pulled the cork further out.

"Maybe you call it that, sir." He seemed as though he was talking only half to me, and half to somebody or something else. His clean-cut, young face even looked a little older for a minute. "But expeditionary ships don't conquer universes, Captain. People do. Lots of people, no longer Earthbound, whose scientific expeditions into Space say that they've licked it—and whose presence, not just in ships, but on other planets, proves it. Someday it'll be more than just Mars, Captain Logan. Someday there'll be fleets of *Conestogas*."

I made a funny sounding laugh which I guess was supposed to get across the idea that one milk run was one too many as things stood, and Adrian just smiled.

"Don't have to worry about your second officer, though, Captain. If I was star-happy I'd be talking out of the other side of my mouth. The macropsychotics want people out of the picture entirely. Get a great urge to purify the universe and all that. . . ."

"I'm not worried," I said. "If anybody's going star-happy aboard this tank it's me. Sometimes I think if people just plain dropped dead it wouldn't be such a bad idea—"

He laughed, a mass-indicator buzzed and he checked on it. He was cross-compensating a trajectory variation when

Sturgess buzzed and I let him come in.

"Captain Logan, sir—"

"Oh for God's sake cut it out, Sturgess. What's on your mind?"

Something was. Sturgess looked different. His face was the same, but something in those eyes of his—different.

"I'd appreciate it if you'd go over a stat-check with me, sir."

"Think I'm qualified, Sturgess?"

"By your leave, sir—" He stood there at attention, rubbing it in. And he was making me do what he wanted me to—and he knew it. But that look in his eyes said that maybe it was more than that. It said there was a chance that somehow Sturgess had gotten himself too deep into something and needed a way out and fast.

"What's your trouble?"

"The specific areas you instructed me to keep under close observation, Captain. I've checked the individual files on each five times. Each one checks out at plus or minus .5 norm—well inside the requisite stability margin. But it's the group check—"

"What about the group check?" I got to my feet.

"I don't know, sir. According to the stat sheets we've got a—they're all—all crazy as bad-bugs, sir."

"They're what?"

And Sturgess was right. I checked with him. The banks of machines whirled and hummed in that conceited way they had, and each time the master file got tossed out with a reading of plus twenty-seven for the whole damned bunch—so far outside allowable behavior expectancy margin that if the computers were right I had a whole tank-full of lunatics aboard ready to split the *Conestoga* apart at the seams.

But that wasn't the way it was.

I had Sturgess assemble the whole hundred-man staff of stewards in an emergency pow-wow and got fast individual reports. No sir, they all said. Everybody quiet—some a little depressed and reading old-fashioned westerns instead of the science-fiction class-

ics—but beyond that, everybody happy. Everything swell. Not a groan in a light-year. Happy . . . happy . . . happy.

I looked at the stewards' faces, and by now they were scared faces. I looked into Sturgess' and it was enigmatic again, some hidden I-told-you-so sneaking just beneath the surface where I couldn't see it.

"What are your orders, Captain?" Sturgess said. Like a little machine. What are my orders, Captain—what do the rule-books say, Captain? There wasn't any answer for this in the rule-books and Sturgess knew it. I'll say he knew it. He was willing to die laughing as long as it was at me.

"Sir—"

It was Adrian. I hadn't known he'd left the bank room, hadn't known he'd heard any of it.

"Yes, what is it?" I was watching Sturgess. No, the machines hadn't been tampered with. I knew, I'd looked. Fast; but with a damn well practiced eye—you've got to know your stat-comps when you're lugging a mob of potential Ward Eights year in and year out. No, it would have taken the kick out of it for Sturgess. It would have to be the real thing—a trumped-up Waterloo wouldn't come close to satisfying the passion he had to see me cook. That's why no time-bomb routine the way it is in stories. That's why the robot routine instead. Waiting . . . waiting for it had to be real—and he'd been lucky with the luck of the damned. He hadn't had to wait long.

"Sir, I've got a theory about the stat-comps. If I may have your permission to try something—" It was Adrian. I could hear him talking, but I wasn't listening.

"All right, go ahead," I said. "And when you're done you can throw the pieces away. You, Sturgess!"

"Yes sir!"

"Quarantine Procedure, and you've got just thirty minutes!"

"Yes sir!" Sturgess turned sharply and went to execute his orders.

ONLY ten minutes after that Adrian found me in communications. The radio crew was already busy knocking out an A-priority SOS on every Patrol wave length on the band, and I invoked the regulation that says a captain can strap on his ship's only R-gun at his own discretion.

One is all you need. A single blast and you can knock a hole in the side of a ship big enough to roll Jupiter through. Raw power.

I strapped the thing on and adjusted the trigger for a half-ounce pressure. Raw power they wanted, raw power they'd get.

"You won't need that, sir." It was Adrian, and there was a flush in his young face.

"You tell me when people run out of respect for a blaster, sonny, and I'll tell you when they're worth their freight."

"No sir—I've found the trouble. My theory, sir—I've got 'em pin-pointed I think."

"Trouble? Theory—hurry up Adrian, I'm busy . . . you, sergeant, make any contacts yet?" The com-sergeant shook his head and I turned back to Adrian. He looked as if he was getting ready to bust wide open.

"It wasn't the comps, sir. It's the people themselves. People have machines beat a mile, sir—and the machines can't keep up, that's all. Machines are a lousy substitute—"

"What are you trying to tell me?"

"My theory, sir—that people's attitudes are constantly changing—maturing, if you want to call it that. The machines were set to analyse the standard of psychological values that were valid when colonization first began fifty years ago. The values changed—slowly, but they do change—and the machines don't."

I didn't get what he was driving at, but I let him rattle it out. Sturgess had fourteen minutes yet, and I had the R-gun ready.

"When the first real move toward Mars started, Captain, it was like—well,

like years ago in the nineteenth century, in a move toward a place they called California and the Barbary Coast. They were first, they were new, and when they hacked out a place to live they used big strokes. Sometimes too big. But after they were through hacking they eventually started the more tedious job of trimming and molding and perfecting. To an extent, at least within the framework of their own back yards, they grew up. The people who came after them didn't come to hack—they came to help perfect. Like these people you've got on board now, Captain. Just like these. Only these people are working on more than a back yard. This one doesn't have any fences. . . ."

"We went all over this once before, Adrian. Now—"

"Let me finish, sir. Because the machines were working on a pretty flexible behavior-constant, the change—and it's been gradual, you see, just bit by bit—the change didn't register until it got big enough to actually invalidate the constant as a whole. Well, it just did."

"Just did what, man?"

"Invalidated the fifty-year-old behavior-constant one hundred per cent, sir. Broke its back! The behavior-change got built up to the point where the old constant just couldn't handle it any longer—simply passed its differential limits. So, the mass file rearing was haywire. The individual ones were too, but it just happened that they looked normal. They could have looked any old way."

"Then the three individual files Sturges had me help him recheck—"

"Two are adolescent cases, sir—the change hasn't affected them yet. The boy and the girl, and the group of men with suspiciously similar names. Kids are kids, and the fast-money people never grow up. It's the third one, sir."

"The philosopher joker, staring out the port."

"Gone, sir. Star-happy as they come. . . ."

I got going. Sturges would be able

to pin-point the old gaffer for me before he was able to do any real damage, and we'd just confine him until we lit on Old Red. And while I was at it, I'd be able to countermand the quarantine order—it's a bad enough order to have to give in the first place, and I wanted to kill it before it did any damage. A hell of a note if I panicked 'em all now. Adrian and his theories be damned, a tank-load of humans could be a powder-keg, and it wouldn't take much to set 'em off. Funny at that, I was figuring, when a kid with a kid's theory can be right just the same. . . .

IT WAS about then that my own private hell broke loose. I had made it almost back to the bank room so I could buzz Sturges when the old duck with the blown fuses popped out in front of me, an old-fashioned slug-tosser in his thin fist—and pointed right at my head. And the way he held it I knew he meant business from start to finish. Where he'd gotten it, or how he'd gotten it aboard, I didn't know—but right then it hardly mattered.

"Stop! Stop, Captain Logan!" The cracked voice made him sound even crazier than he looked, and the film of sweat that glistened on his neck above a high white collar and on the bony places in his face made him look even more like something resurrected from a grave dug a century ago. The black cloak he wore might have been used to bury him in.

I stopped. I wouldn't have gone for the R-gun, even if the cannon-like barrel of the slug-tosser had been shaking. It couldn't have shaken less in the jaws of a vise.

"I am taking control of your ship, Captain! Yes, yes I am! I want you to press the button by the port and make them open it! Then you must make them come out here, and I will go inside! I mean it, Captain Logan, yes I do, I mean it!"

Those eyes of his were pools of blood on fire.

"You haven't a chance, pop," I told him. "My officers will be reporting back here any minute."

"Let 'em, Captain Logan! If they budge an inch toward me I'll shoot you right in the head! You and them too and everybody! I'm going to kill everybody, Captain. I'm going to take this horrible dirty ship into the sun as fast as it will go! Press that button, Captain!"

His trigger-finger was white with pressure at the knuckle, just like in one of those old-fashioned westerns. If I didn't signal my three non-coms he'd just blow my head off and signal them himself. But this way it was better. This way he had a hostage and five slugs was enough for one man. He didn't know how many men there were inside.

But it added up to the same thing so I pressed the button.

The lock buzzed and clicked.

"Push it open, Captain—push it open, and order them all to come out!"

I pushed it, and I was trying to think but I didn't have any answers. He was cagey and he kept far enough from me so that I couldn't jump him—I'd be a cold mackerel before I laid a finger on him. The port swung open.

"Go on! Call them out! All of them! When I go in I'll kill whoever is left!"

He had me stymied there too, so I did what he said.

"Johnston! Gates! Steinhammer! Out here on the double!"

They came. By the time each one saw what was going on it was too late to do anything, and the old joker was starting his move for the bank room.

Half inside the open port he stopped and sort of grinned at me.

"I'm not the only one, Captain! Oh, no! Space hates you too! Space doesn't want you and your horrible ships full of people trampling through it, spoiling it . . . people are horrid, Captain, and shouldn't try to pollute the beautiful purity of the Universe with their little, filthy souls! No, they shouldn't try, Captain—. Space is their enemy and so am I! So am I! And when these die in the

Sun, others will be afraid to come. . . ."

THERE was the sudden sound of running boots coming from the A-deck ramp and I expected him to shoot the four of us down where we stood. But he didn't. He waited, because he had more to say and I guess he figured the bigger the audience the better.

Sturgess and Adrian just stopped in their tracks.

"Move another inch, gentlemen, and I will blow your captain's head off! Now listen to me—I've got more to tell you—"

Sturgess looked at me and I looked back at him.

No, the old goon wouldn't be fast enough on the trigger to get two men at once. Me, he could get. And then Sturgess would have him before he could move another muscle.

I couldn't tell what Sturgess was thinking.

"My first officer's coming to disarm you," I said. "You won't have time for both of us. Mr. Sturgess! Get him!"

And the old goat turned tail and bolted into the bank room!

"Only one man can get through the port at a time!" he was shrieking. "Try to get me and I'll blast you one at a time!"

"Christ, he didn't even shut the port!" Sturgess growled. "Cap—"

But I wasn't waiting to figure the ifs and buts of how lunatics think.

"Life boats are the only chance," I said. "Sturgess, you and Adrian—"

Sturgess just stood there.

"Nuts," he said. There was still that icy look in his eyes and I knew he'd caught me second-guessing again.

"That's an order!"

"You should see what's happened to the life-boats, Logan, and you'd forget about your precious orders. We've seen 'em—Adrian and me—that's what all the running was about. Out of fifty boats, the old coot had time to get to all but five. Forty-five boats, so much junk, Logan."

"Then we'll use five! We can at least save five hundred of the damned fools anyway—"

I heard Adrian's voice. It was thin and nervous. "And leave forty-five hundred to—to burn, sir? In the sun. . . ."

I looked at Sturgess and this time I could read something in his face. It said well here we are again and how was I going to play it this time?

Regulations. Forty-five hundred "pioneers." Adrian and his nervous voice. Sturgess, looking straight through me.

I looked at the open port and started running, reaching for my R-gun.

And Adrian was in front of me, blocking me!

"Not you, sir! Ships need men like you! I'll do—"

I saw the swinging spanner wrench glance off Adrian's head first but there wasn't time to duck it because we were too close. A hell of a pain, and then I folded to the deck like a cruiser with blown jets. . . .

When one of the non-coms finally brought me around, Sturgess was gone and I could see Johnston working over Adrian.

I slammed my hand to my thigh, and the cumbersome R-gun just wasn't there any longer.

Easy sir. You'll be all right, and so will Lieutenant Adrian."

"Easy! For God's sake man—" And then I saw it. The bank room port. Shut, sealed.

"It was Sturgess, sir. He grabbed the spanner off the bulkhead there and clouted the two of you. Then he grabbed your R-gun. He was yelling like hell and none of us—we just couldn't move, sir. He

was just like he'd gone crazy!"

"Come on, come on!" I tried to make it up on one elbow, fell back.

"It was all so fast, sir. He ran through the port and hauled it closed with one arm, carrying the R-gun in the other, not even aiming it. We heard the sound of a shot—and the R-gun, both together. He must've been blasting away even when the old guy's bullet drilled him, sir."

"But did he get him, did he get—"

"He didn't have to, sir. He knew he'd never have time for a second blast, so he must've just let go at the hull itself. When the air in there left it sounded like a—a banshee straight out of hell, Captain. . . ."

"When the air. . . ."

"Yes sir. We'll have it patched as soon as Steinhammer gets some of the maintenance crew with suits up here."

I felt dizzy. Dizzy all over. "He yelled, you say. . . ."

"Yes sir. He hollered—said to tell you Lieutenant Adrian had a point, but if you still wanted to be a—a damn cynic, sir, you could go to the—go to the devil."

Gates got me up and then helped me to my feet. I looked over at Adrian, and he was beginning to come out of it. I told Johnston I'd take it from there.

I guess I wanted to tell the kid what happened myself.

I wanted to tell him about the milk run. About people and about Space—or maybe he'd be telling me.

But anyway, Mars or bust, I'd tell him. Mars or bust, that's their motto, come hell or damnation. . . .

Our job: Get 'em there.

*Leigh Brackett, Henry Kuttner, Carl Jacobi, L. Sprague de Camp,
and other Headliners in the March—*

FANTASTIC STORY MAGAZINE

NOW ON SALE—25c AT ALL STANDS!

EXPEDITION to EARTH

By ROBERT ZACKS

They were a motley crew, all sizes, colors and shapes,

but they had one idea in common—to conquer Earth!

Report # K-9241

From—Investigation Unit 33
Meerson-Iat (Commander)

To—Headquarters 10
Star 447, Nebula ZR-8
Boleg-Sof (Commander)

Subject—Progress on Establishment of Observation Post on Planet 3E, known to its inhabitants as EARTH);

PER instructions we have withdrawn all scout ships from the lower atmosphere to the mother ship out in space. It is assumed this will effectively quiet the curiosity of the inhabitants. One of the cumbersome flying machines that tried to follow a scout ship had the misfortune to crash. Since this took place in an unsettled area our scout ship took advantage of this opportunity. The native was still alive though unconscious. He was brought to the laboratory and studied while being given medical attention.

Since it is absolutely essential to study this planet at close quarters without alarming the natives, in order to determine in a systematic fashion whether they will be more useful to us as servants, laborers, or for amusement or medical research, we are now determining how this is to be done.

Our difficulty, of course, comes from

the differences in appearance, body construction and atmospheres breathed by various crew members. Jel-lal, our surgeon, for instance, captured last year, in Nebulae 76, and impressed into service lives in a tank of liquid whose formula is H_2O . Two of the crew require an atmosphere of methane and, even in the space ship, must wear a breathing apparatus. And those of us with extra limbs or of four and six footed construction who are oxygen breathers are used to either heavier or lighter concentrations. We are faced with the difficult problem of how to mix with the inhabitants without making them aware of the fact that they are being studied by a higher and alien form of life from beyond the stars.

Were it not for the fact that our instruments detected the mastery of atomic energy I would recommend the usual forced invasion technique. But as it is, we have no idea just how developed their thinking and war weapons are. If we were to attack outright, we might lose too many of our race. It must be kept in mind that we pay for our extreme longevity with a very low breathing rate—one in ninety time units—and have already sustained great losses.



Fen gathered in the nebular restaurant

Therefore, we must solve the problem of close range observation without creating interest or alarm.

Perhaps our study of the captured native will yield us a clue.

Meerson-Lat
Commander

* * * * *

Report # K-9242

From—Investigation Unit 33

Meerson-Lat (Commander)

To—Headquarters 10

Star 447, Nebula ZR-8

Boleg-Sol (Commander)

Subject—Progress on Establishment of Observation Post on Planet 3E (known to its inhabitants as EARTH):

GOOD news! A solution to our problem has been arrived at through the use of drugs upon the captured native. He is in a state of narcosis and his memory bank translated visually to our surgical screen enabled us to interpret and interpolate sufficient data to aid us in our course.

The native, known by the designation Jim Hollis, startled us tremendously when we studied him. At first we were considerably alarmed to see upon the surgical screen visualizations from his memory indicating a complete awareness and acceptance of life on other worlds, including an astonishing knowl-

edge, in integrated patterns, of physics, astronomy, chemistry and physical sciences. However when we painstakingly traced these thoughts back to their source we uncovered both an amusing answer and a solution to our problem simultaneously.

This native, Jim Hollis, is what is known on this planet as a "science fiction fan," that is, he is a fanatical follower of a group of theorists whose advanced thinking has been able to find expression only on the level of literature-pretense. In a way this is a magnificent find. Within the confines of this group we can discover all we must know in a short space of time, and should be able to proceed with our exploitation of these natives efficiently.

Our plan is as follows.

Using Jim Hollis as our agent, controlling him through drugs and auto-suggestion, we are going to establish ourselves directly in one of the large cities and observe the natives at first hand.

We are going to establish a restaurant—a dining place—for these science fiction fans. It will be decorated in such a way as to appeal to this group of advanced thinkers and there will be the pretense that our crew members are really earth inhabitants who are cleverly made up as creatures from other planets. Crew members will act as servants (waiters, they are called) and will be in constant contact with natives drawn by curiosity to this venture.

Of course we will have to exercise ingenuity. For instance, crew members with four arms will have to keep two of them dangling to give the appearance of artificiality. Jel-lal, our surgeon, will be a problem but we can solve that, I think. And where one of the crew is so alien appearing as to be impossible for use, he will either be left on the space ship or put into a dead animal's skin to make him more acceptable.

Mastery of the language is now proceeding through the captured native. Information obtained from him regarding

currency (which can easily be duplicated) customs and other necessary data, is being studied.

Copies of newspapers (as they are called) reporting on our activities will be transmitted to you in translation so that you may train additional crews in habits, customs and thinking techniques of this planet, since it is possible something might go wrong and we will be lost. In which case duplication of work won't be necessary.

It is estimated the restaurant, which will be named, the NEBULAE, can be established in six months (one-third unit of time).

Meerson-Lat
Commander

* * * * *

Transmittal Document # 1—(Clipped from newspaper—translated)

To—Headquarters 10

From—Earth Observation Unit.....

THE RESTAURANT NEWS-GAZETTE

December 12, 1952

The Tasty Dish Column—

by Mike West

SCIENCE-FICTION EATERY

PACKS THEM IN BUT GOOD

Broadway, N.Y.—

WELL, now I've seen everything!

Your correspondent has eaten tamales in Mexico served by dark-eyed señoritas, curry with spice that's nice in India as the guest of a Maharajah, and even blubber in an Eskimo's igloo while with Peterson the Arctic explorer. But now I've finally left this old planet (figuratively speaking) and eaten stuff right out of this world. I refer to the new science fiction restaurant off Broadway where there's a Venus Room complete with a giant wall tank containing (no kidding) a *live octopus*, said octopus staring at you as closely as you stare at him (it gives you the willies); there's a Mars room where the carpet is red sand, the chairs and tables are carved of solid rock and you are served by two characters dressed in Buck Rogers suits complete with closed helmets whose faceplates are polarized glass, I think.

The waiter can see you but you can't see him. Sure must be hot in that helmet! The union ought to get after the boss of the joint on working conditions—at least the waiters should get a breath of air. From the way they move, sort of shuffling, the outfit must be exhausting.

The headwaiter will scare hell out of you. Who the taxidermist was that cured the skin he wears I don't know, but the guy's dressed like a giant tiger-cat, six feet eight inches tall, standing on hind legs, color of the hide purple and gold. Instead of paws he has eight fingers hidden in a sort of rubbery glove and he writes with two of them, the others hang limp, as if stuffed.

There's no conversation, all business is transacted by scribbling messages to the customers on pads of paper, but you, dear customers, can talk freely, ordering whatever you wish from the incredible menu.

I had a snake-egg soufflé à la Pluto, a weird dish that had the same effect on my sense of balance as a shot of gin with no chaser. There was a luminous vegetable soup which strangely bothered my eyes until I actually thought the miniature stalks of celery in it were trying to crawl out of the bowl, were alive and could move.

Delicious. Then I ordered something called *Breesk* which looked like a plastic black cube three inches square. Most astonishing thing I ever ate. It's hard until you pour a violet sauce over it and then it gives off smoke and a heady food perfume, turning soft and gooey. Tastes like a cross between filet mignon and peanut butter, believe it or not.

There just isn't room here to tell all the details of this astonishing joint, about the weird drinks that keep changing color as you watch, the peculiar Jupiter Room where you suddenly feel as if you can't lift your feet and a very squat, dwarflike guy with legs like a champion wrestler offers you a tray of hors d'oeuvres.

When you try to pick up one of the

shrimplike goodies you think it's a gag at first, that it's stuck to the tray. Then you heave and believe it or not the thing must weigh ten pounds. Some trick. Guess it's done by magnets.

When I left, the photographers from Life Magazine were coming in and the place was jammed. The celebrities now have a new gathering place.

See you in the Venus Room, folks. I'll be holding hands with that octopus, heh, heh!

—Mike West

* * * * *

Transmitted Document # 2 (found in pocket of captured native)

To—Headquarters 10

From—Earth Observation Unit

THE EMERALD ROOF

'Broadway's Popular Priced Nightclub'

Memo From Desk Of

Billy Close—Proprietor

To—Dan Ritter, Assistant Manager

SAY, Dan, did you take a peek at that new science fiction restaurant? It's overwhelming. I got an awfully queer feeling about the joint when I dropped in. Something odd about it. Apparently the owners of the venture don't want to be known. They got a front guy, a Jim Hollis who has the best poker face I ever saw. He won't tell me a thing. I called the owners of the building, Rentem Realty, and they say Jim Hollis handled the whole thing and what's more he paid cash. There must be racketeer dough behind it.

Anyway, we better get on the ball and meet this competition. I'm sending you two samples of a fruit I got in their Venus room. Taste one of them and let the Chef have a bite. It's something completely new, a sort of licorice flavored apple with a touch of rum, only it looks like an eggplant.

They must have developed it in some research station and grown it secretly somewhere (my guess is South America) in order to get a headstart on the market. So trace it and get our order in even if they put the squeeze on us.

I called the neon sign people and asked why the hell they didn't give me first crack at the new type sign they put up for the science fiction joint. That color, I mean. I can't figure how that color was obtained. Who ever heard of a new color? It isn't red, yellow, green, blue, purple, pink, orange . . . hell, it isn't anything. Most gorgeous thing I ever saw.

They said it must be an accident and they'll investigate. They didn't do that job, they said. They're all excited about it.

You know, I just can't get over the feeling there's something very queer about the place. Those costumes are awfully good on those phony planetoid waiters. That character with the extra two stuffed arms and that silly helmet and oxygen tank, for instance. While I was staring at him a fly landed on his helmet face-glass. His hand held dishes at the time. Well, I could have sworn one of his stuffed arms swatted at that fly. But Larry who was with me, says I had too much of that peculiar drink *Melpek*, the Martian Sherry. And by the way, I'd like to find out where they got that stuff too.

Damn it, I've been sitting here staring at this memo for an hour. Something's bothering me and I don't know what. About that science fiction joint.

I'm going down to investigate it again. I got a feeling about that place. That guy Jim Hollis for instance, that look in his eyes. Like he's been drugged or he's a hophead. Maybe we ought to check on him. I think I'll try to get his fingerprints and shoot them down to my pal J. Edgar and see what gang he's tied up with.

BILLY CLOZE, DAN RITTER
MISSING, FAMILIES FRANTIC
Police are investigating the sudden disappearance of . . .

* * * * *

*Transmittal Document # 4 (found in pocket
of one of four captured natives)*
To—Headqtrs 10
From—Earth Observ.
Unit

Bulletin—23
Subject—Picketing Call

RESTAURANT UNION-LOCAL 999
NYC

THE following members are assigned to four hours night picket duty before the NEBULAE, the new science fiction restaurant. Negotiations with manager Jim Hollis bogged down when, after agreeing to allow his imported restaurant help to join the union, he refused to allow us to take fingerprints of the help as per union regulations.

This can mean only one thing. That crook Joe Pagiano is again trying to get into the industry and wants to take over our union. We all remember what trouble we had until we threw the bums out. Probably those characters at the NEBULAE have police records a mile long. No wonder they're hiding their faces in those helmets.

Let's nip them in the bud now, fellows, before they become a *ménage*.

Assigned to Wednesday night—Holloway, Filetti, Bernstein and O'Brien. Shout good and loud when you march up and down, boys. Give them everything you've got.

Bob Parker, *President*

* * * * *

Transmittal Document # 5 (clipped from newspaper—translated)
To—Headquarters 10
From—Earth Observ.
Unit

Transmittal Document # 3 (clipped from newspaper—translated)
To—Headquarters 10
From—Earth Observation
Unit

THE DAILY RECORD
December 18, 1962
MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

THE DAILY RECORD
December 20, 1962
ANOTHER DISAPPEARANCE.
FOUR UNION PICKETS.

Last night the president of Restaurant Union Local 999, Robert Parker, received a letter signed by four of his union members, said letter informing of their decision to quit the union and leave on a tour of Europe. This completely baffling incident. . .

* * * * *

Report # 9243
From—Investigation Unit 33
 Meerson-Lat (Commander)
To—Headquarters 10
 Star 447, Nebula ZR-8
 Boleg-Sof (Commander)
Subject—Unfortunate Developments on Establishment of Observation Post on Planet 3E (Known as EARTH)

AT THE present moment we have in our cages and under narcosis six natives, all males, whose curiosity or undue attention caused us considerable concern. As was inevitable, some of the complex risks our project faced worked against us and we are dealing with them as they appear. The five Transmittal Documents included will explain details.

However it is my judgment that the length of time we can maintain this observation post is very short. Soon the duplicate currency we created will be detected and traced. In addition, a hypnotic study of one of our captives, Billy Close, indicates he succeeded in obtaining fingerprints of our useful tool Jim Hollis (this is a sort of infallible identification mark similar to our brain wavelength studies for each intelligent creature), and has forwarded such record to some central file for clearance.

It is just a matter of time until it is discovered that Jim Hollis is the supposedly dead pilot of the crashed flying machine that tried to follow one of our scout ships.

Since our objective is to determine the state of advancement of atomic weapons, and since we have so short a time (and must operate under the difficulty of never allowing the inhabitants of EARTH to realize that they are being studied by intelligences from outer

space,) we have invited all the eminent scientists in the field of physics to visit our science fiction restaurant.

The names of these natives were obtained, of course, by our captive surgeon, Jel-lal who is being held in a tank of H₂O in the Venus Room of the NEBULAE. As you know, Jel-lal is a limited telepath and can read minds, though he lacks the ability to project his own thoughts. As usual he was obstinate, but a decrease in the oxygen pumped into the limited water supply of his tank brought him under control. He picked up the names of the leading scientists from the mind of a well-known editor of a science fiction magazine and who seems to know just about everybody in the field of physics.

When these scientists arrive, having been invited to attend a special conclave, they shall be put under narcotics and brought to our laboratories for hypnosis and similar studies. We shall discover just how dangerous their research into atomic weapons are and eliminate their arsenals. Then we shall invade the planet.

It is my tentative conclusion that these natives will be useful for the following things:

Food—Jel-lal's planet 23-Z known as Zeno, in Nebulae 76 is, like this one, covered with vast oceans of liquid H₂O. One of the reasons for the belligerence of Jel-lal's type of creature is the frightful competition for non-toxic foods. It is suggested that these natives would be non-toxic to Jel-lal and could be fed to this technician class in return for willing service. As it is, Jel-lal has not performed a single major surgical feat willingly, even though sometimes we've put irritant chemicals into his tank.

Labor—These natives would be useful in mining and agriculture.

Medicine—It is likely these natives would be excellent growing mediums for the maggots that produce Vellium, that excellent nerve medicine.

We expect to have the scientists captured by next week. Acceptances have

been received by Jim Hollis from men
amed Menstein, Bloppenheimer . . .
Madam Lise Retiner (female) . . .
etc. . .

Meerson-Lat
Commander

* * * * *

Report # K-9245

From—Investigation Unit 33

Meerson-Lat (Commander)

To—Headquarters 10

Star 447, Nebula ZR-8

Boleg-Sof (Commander)

Subject—FINAL REPORT On Observation Unit
on Planet 3E (EARTH)

1—Our plan has failed.

2—We have closed the observation post designated THE NEBULAE, a restaurant where we planned to capture the key native scientists. We were extremely fortunate to have been able to leave without being detected as alien intelligences. In order to guarantee this vital lack of knowledge we have been forced to release all captives in wild areas after first ridding their minds of memories of us. They will recall only vague nightmare images.

3—Scientists failed to enter THE NEBULAE as we planned. Transmittal Documents included with this report give full details. Awaiting instructions.

Meerson-Lat
Commander

* * * * *

Transmittal Document # 6 (clipped from paper—translated)

To—Headquarters 10

From—Earth Observ. Unit (Withdrawn)

THE DAILY RECORD

DECEMBER 29, 1952

THE SCIENCE WORLD COLUMN

by Hill Lawrence

TODAY your correspondent had a most interesting conversation with that white-maned dean of scientists, Albert Menstein. His mild, brown eyes had a baffled look in them as I asked him how he was feeling, now that his eyes were somewhat rested.

"My eyes are fine," he said calmly. "There was nothing wrong with my eyes two days ago either."

I maintained a discreet silence. It will be remembered that two days ago Mr. Menstein was supposed to attend a gathering of scientists invited to the new

NEBULAE restaurant, an unusually imaginative spot aimed at the science fiction fan trade.

For some reason Albert Menstein became alarmed when he first arrived at the door of the NEBULAE. He stood frozen for a few minutes, according to reporters, and then immediately turned to the F.B.I. man who is attached to each important atomic physicist. In sharp terms he demanded that all physicists be immediately intercepted and not allowed to enter the restaurant.

His order was followed, but not without great mystification. Shortly thereafter a cordon of police surrounded the NEBULAE and tried to enter the doors which somehow had been locked. After equipment was brought by the fire department, the place was entered forcibly, at Mr. Menstein's insistence. All that was found was some dummy diving suits on the floor.

At that time the mystery was further heightened by Mr. Menstein's anguish when a fireman accidentally broke the glass sign that glowed in advertisement of the NEBULAE.

I asked him why he had been so upset.

"The color," said Albert Menstein quietly. "Didn't you read about it? Did you see it at all? The color which glowed inside the glass tube of that sign?"

"No," I said. "I heard it was an odd shade but—"

"Sir," said Albert Menstein in a clipped voice. "I am a mathematician and a physicist. I know the spectrum. I know what colors are visible to the human eye and what wave-lengths are not, such as infra-red and ultra-violet."

"I'm sure you do, sir," I replied.

"That color was a new color," said Albert Menstein leaning forward, his eyes piercing. "Do you understand young man? A new color! There is no such thing. Nobody has been able to find a word to describe it."

"But," I said, "perhaps it was something atmospheric. Or your eyes were a little—"

"It was a color," interrupted Albert

Menstein icily, "that was not from this world. It was not the product of any element known to man."

I left soon after. He would not say more beyond that it was a great pity that the gas creating that other-worldly color had escaped from the glass tube. I got the impression that much, much more was going on that he could tell me.

The octopus, and a pretty poor imitation at that, which they found in the tank in the Venus Room, seemed to be made of some inferior plastic, and had deteriorated rather badly after prolonged contact with water.

We give the manager of the NEBULA credit for trying—it was fun while it lasted, and better luck next time!

—H. F.

* * * * *

Report # K-9246

From—Investigation Unit 33

Meerson-Lat (Commander)

To—Headquarters 10

Star 447, Nebula ZR-8

Meerson-Lat
Commander

Boleg-Sof (Commander)
Subject—RETURN OF EXPEDITION from Planet 3E (EARTH)

THE expedition will return to home base, arrival time approximately 180 time units from time of receipt. Unfortunately, we left in such haste that we were forced to leave behind our surgeon, Jel-lal. Since it was generally difficult to obtain his cooperation in grave and urgent situations, we feel his absence no loss.

We will abandon for the time being our plan to conquer and invade Planet 3E. From our researches and observations it would appear that the technology of the planet's inhabitants is so advanced that it will soon exterminate the major portions of its population. It will then be a simple matter for us to claim the empty planet.

This will be our last communication as we will soon go into space-sleep for the remainder of our journey home.

TWO BRILLIANT SHORT SCIENCE-FICTION NOVELS



TURNCOAT

By DAMON KNIGHT

and

THE DIPLOIDS

By KATHERINE MacLEAN

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THRILLING WONDER STORIES

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SPACE STATION

(Continued from page 6)

I heartily agree with H. Moskowitz on why he likes space opera. Going one step further, one might also compare it to movies here on Terra. Some people like Musicals, others Adventure or Westerns, but just because some scientist comes along and starts feeding the public documentaries on the Mating Life of an Earthworm, or an explanation of the Atom Bomb, that doesn't mean that the public don't like to relax once in a while. And also, not everyone can write space opera—a writer who specializes in Mystery is going to have a hard time writing up a passable western novel, while Zane Grey could have done it if he wanted in a couple of weeks.

Now, back to the magazine, and the stories (Sam, if everyone wrote in to your column without comments on les histoires, where would I be who hadn't read last month's mag?)

After glancing at F.F.O.R., I thumbed through the magazine searching for plausible stories to read. Then I came across one with footnotes every second page. I looked at the title, and the author's name, but no one had to tell me that good old Ken Crossen had written it— isn't it obvious?

Next I found a very well written little story by Bob Zacks, called THE LAST TEST. It had been cheerfully noted down in the index as a (quote) Short Story. (unquote). I had started into, thinking "what a nice letter I'm going to write Sam Mines this time," when I turned the page (AAAAAAH!)—"2½ Pages long!" I screamed. "Mines can't do that! He can't! He can't! He can't!" But he had. Don't get me wrong. It isn't that I didn't like the story. I loved every 30-Paragraph bit of it. But it was so short! I don't think that you could be that cruel, Sam, to chop off the other 87½ pages from it (did you?) but if Zacks had written even only about ten pages more, it would have been perfect. As it was, it left me hanging in mid-air.

TOY TIGER was another nice story by Phyllis S. Smith, but I suppose that's the trouble with writing a good story like QUAKER LADY & THE JELLYPH even if you write a fair one like this it disappoints your readers.

That's all for this time, Sam. I haven't got around to reading the novel yet, cause I'm already scared this won't reach you in time. That's a thought. At the top of every letter column put down the latest date the letter has to reach you by. Then us fan won't be wasting both time and patience writing these letters, nobow.—63 Glenridge Ave. St. Catharines, Ont

Amidst all the griping about the short stories versus the long novels, we spot a trend. (Didn't we ever tell you we are (am? is?) an old trend spotter? Yep. We is.). Anyway, once upon a time only the novels were any good. None of your hardened characters would even waste a sneer on the short stories. Now there's a break in that united front. Once in a while somebody leans over backwards and says, "Say, wassamatter, Sam— you sick? That story by

Umbglumh wasn't half bad at all." This leads us to believe that at last you are getting to understand what a short story is. Quote: a single effect. It's a job; harder in many respects than writing a longer piece.

Sound idea of yours, giving the fan a deadline for their letters. You want us to encourage them yet?

THAT LONG UNDERWEAR

by Hikel Handloff

Dear Mr. Mines: I have just finished reading the Dec. Space Stories and found it well worth the quarter. First off, the Vance story, *Planet of the Damned*, was, in my humble opinion, great! It alone was enough to make it a good issue. *Get Along, Little Unicorn* was good, but the other three weren't so hot, but they were only about 1/6 of the zine. The cover was fair, not as good as the one on the first issue. . . . However, more good stories by Vance and KFC and you'll be sure of snagging my two bits every month, no matter what's on the cover. Why don't I like the cover? First of all, that spaceship (I guess that's what it's supposed to be) just don't look like a spaceship to me. That tail assembly makes it look like an oversized jet plane. And what's that the girl's wearing? A doo suit? Long woolen underwear? The new look? When I looked at your contents page, the first thing that caught my eye was the phrase "Every story brand new." My favorite words (next to "Pay to the order of —") Next issue looks pretty good from here, what with Brackett and Dickson, so until then, I remain PANatically yours—37 So. Delaware Pl. Atlantic City, N.J.

Unhappily we are forced to agree with you about the long green woolen underwear. Sometimes you can't tell how it is going to come out until you see the finished cover and then it's too late. Still, this was Earle Bergery's last cover for us—it wasn't one of his best, but no one knew at the time that it was going to be his last.

Vance's *PLANET OF THE DAMNED* and *THE BIG JUMP* by Leigh Brackett were pretty good space opera, we thought—fairly typical of the kind of story we want for this magazine. You agree?

WHAT, NO CAP FUTURE?

by Donald S. Horning

Dear Mr. Mines, The second issue of your magazine has broken a fervent resolution of mine to never lower myself to the type of thing so often found in your letter columns. The final straw was "Toy Tiger".

We were promised SPACE stories. I thought that meant horse opera in rocket ships. "Toy Tiger" was not even good, let alone in conformity with your title. Your lead story was more what I was expecting.

Perhaps your make-up man has been reading too many of those idiotic letters sent in by so-called "fan" and mixed up two of your magazines. That is the most charitable explanation that I can think of, and the remedy is obvious.

The rest of the magazine is fine as long as you do not allow Capt. Future to return to life.—
2324 SE 57th Ave., Portland 15, Ore.

This second issue, December, 1952, featured PLANET OF THE DAMNED, which we thought was pretty good space opera. On top of that, you wouldn't want all the short stories to be pure space stuff too, would you? Don't you think that's a little too much of a good thing and that some variety would keep your tastes fresher? Anyway, that's the way we figured it. The longer stories—by all means space opera, so far as humanly possible. But in the shorts, a bit of variety. That a bad idea?

Today the return of Captain Future seems unlikely. Sorry, Hank.

THE EAGLE EYE

by Noah W. McLeod

Dear Sam: As you want letters for your Letter Department in SPACE STORIES, I will, as your friend and well wisher, put in my two cents worth.

I have so far managed to read and enjoy the first two numbers of SPACE STORIES. They are both excellent numbers well worth the price of a quarter.

The stories in the first number have no serious faults, but I would like to make some criticism of PLANET OF THE DAMNED and GET ALONG LITTLE UNICORN in your second number.

The Vance space opera was a good competent story. In my opinion it just missed being in the same class as Heinlein's THE LOGIC OF THE EMPIRE, for two reasons. First absolutely no indication is given of the workings of the Klau empire. Did it come into existence as the result of overpopulation, of a power drive, or desire for wealth on the part of the Klau? Or did it come into existence as the result of some subtle peculiarity of the Klau social system? How did it work? Were the slave camps run by a government department as in Russia, or by private corporations? What effect did these huge slave labor enterprises have upon the economics of the Galaxy? Vance nowhere tries to answer these questions, which could have furnished some interesting episodes. As result of these omissions, what might have been mature science fiction becomes a tale of jungle adventure, which is however well written except for the ending.

But it is in striving after a happy ending that Jack Vance, pulls a real bowler. No where's are we told that Kometik Leham really loved Barch.

[Turn Page]

TO PEOPLE Who Want to Write but can't get started

Do you have that constant urge to write but fear that a beginner hasn't a chance? Then listen to what the former editor of Liberty said on this subject:

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—Elmer Ferrell
Editor, 2 Box 140 Laramie, Wyo.

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There is no indication that it was regarded as essential or even desirable among the Lekthwa that an unwed mother marry the father of her child Kometik Leliane had deserted Barch before. There is no convincing proof that she ceased to regard him as inferior. Yet Vance would have us believe that after Kometik Leliane had let Barch make love to her from force of circumstances and had run out on him before, she would turn around and become his wife for no sufficient reason. That's not convincing!

Give us more Vance. In spite of all his faults he makes interesting reading.

The error in GET ALONG LITTLE UNICORN consists in having the action from page 121 to page 127, take place on Arcturus itself. That would make the action take place at a temperature of about 5000 degrees and under a gravity of about 4g. Nowhere is any such temperature indicated in the story. In case Crossen does not know it, Arcturus is not a planet but a star. It is a little cooler than the Sun and gives off about 100 times as much light. But the Marmots would have to be some critters to dig burrows in the hot photosphere of a class K giant star.

Give us more Crossen! His science may be corny, but his humor is good.—Christine N. Dakota.

What we liked best was your conclusion in each case. Give us more Vance, more Crossen—this after a bit of choice G.I.-type griping in each case. Wasn't there a big hassle once about whether an author should bend science a bit for the sake of a good story, or whether he should be scrupulous about the science even at the cost of the story? If the latter, you'd have to throw out practically every one of the stories written about Venus, nearly all of which depict it as a lush jungle instead of the waterless, methane-poisoned desert it is. So we'll get you more Vance and Crossen.

A NIGGLING BONE

by Richard E. Geis

Dear Sam: I just finished listening to Alistair Cooke, the "resident spy" from England. He was discussing the bad cultural Americanisms which the British have adopted, and imitate most badly. He mentioned bad movies, gangster stories, be-bop, jazz, and at the very end of the list . . . science fiction. I just sat there and blinked. I isolated the statement in my mind and turned it over and over, examining it from all angles, then concluded that we aren't quite as respectable . . . as yet . . . as we would like to think. Maybe you heard him too.

The main purpose of this letter, however, is to give you a great big pat on the back for buying and printing PLANET OF THE DAMNED By Jack Vance. A Vance story is a treat for me because he has the uncanny ability of creating new planets, races, cultures, civilizations, etc., with such incredible realism, such first hand I was-there knowledge, and . . . perhaps more important . . . establishing real people who stay in character and act like humans and non humans do, that I feel and identify and live his stories much more com-

pletely than those of no other writer I can think of in the science-fantasy field. Sam, what I'm trying to say is that Vance is, in my book at least, the best WRITER you have working for you. There is only one little niggle bone I would pick, his plots are of the rusty hinge type. They positively squeak with age. That is a minor point and a trifling thing at best. He could use the creakiest of plots and breathe life into it as easily as I misspell some of these words. How does the man keep all his characters straight? How does he create an entire planet and culture out of nothing . . . and keep it all straight in his head? As an amateur writer I know whereof I speak. His feats are enormous. I wish he had two heads and four arms so he could produce twice as much enjoyment for me— Say, do you suppose he could be a BEM posing as a human? That could explain the utter realism of his stories. These planets really exist and he is just recording his memories in fiction form. Maybe he was stranded here when his saucer broke down. His friends are searching the planet for him, but he fixes it here and won't show himself to them.

I'll sell this theory to you cheap, Sam. Lifetime subs to all your mags and it's yours.—2631 N. Mississippi, Portland 12, Oregon

Vance, we think, is one of the best storytellers around—and if you want to make a different category of that from "writer"—you go right ahead. Some writers aren't particularly good story tellers. But Vance reaches out and hooks you and drags you into his story and there you stay while it goes like a roller coaster. Unless you just don't happen to like Vance, then you don't buy a ticket. But most of us do. You'll find the pro writers have just as much variation in their likes and dislikes as the fans and among the pros there is a large and growing appreciation of Jack Vance's terrific gifts.

BLAST OFF

by Gail Sprague

Dear Mr. Mines: Would any S.F. fans care to join "The International Flying Saucer Bureau? If so would they please write me for more information?

If you publish this request, I might someday sell you a story—that is if I ever write one. Thank you very, very, very much!—622 So. 4th Avenue, Wausau, Wisconsin.

First Moon tickets at the Hayden Planetarium, now flying saucers. Stay with it, Gail. Things being as they are, you'll probably get customers.

CUTLERY DEPT.

by T. A. B. White

Dear Editor: Having just completed reading the first issue of your magazine "Space Stories" I have decided to write and add my comments to the many you will no doubt receive.

I like the front cover, the straight lines and

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SLIGHTLY ACETIC

by John Brunner

Dear Sam: I just finished reading the inaugural ish of your new effort *Space Stories* and the ensuing heap of guff is my personal analysis of it.

Commencing in the usual fashion with the cover: I liked the layout—it's tidy and legible, but I feel the words in the bottom left could easily have been put up top with the rest of the lettering. The pic itself was, of course, meticulously done (when was Emshwiller anything but thus?) but I'm forced to admit that otherwise it's the silliest I've seen in a long time. Why isn't there an elevator for the poor so-and-so's? And I feel Arthur C. Clarke would have (or has had) something to say about that highly inefficient-looking ship.

Someone, the other day, defined Walton's novel as containing everything but the kitchen sink. As I leaf through it, I run across: universal teleportation, a lost Martian civilization, racial memory, interplanetary colonization, corrupt police and righteous rebels, mutation, transtemporal, ego-exchange, four-dimensional awareness, the atomic devastation of Earth, a dragged-in so-called scientific rewrite of the Cretan Minoan mythos involving the following stock hunks of ham: the soul-stealers, aliens masquerading as human beings, religion and magic on a scientific basis, considerable swordplay, a malignant robot, considerable sadism lifted from Shaver (but mercifully not so lovingly detailed), heroic self-sacrifice (by Conan!), the 'origin' of the Norse god Thor (this apparently as an after-thought); a closed time-cycle, and once again the items at the head of the list.

Now Sam, I ask you—is it good policy to write that way? Everything but the kitchen sink! I've read better in *Planet* and lord knows they've plumbed the depths of the si-cum blood-and-guts type tale since way back.

THE INVADERS too is strictly stock, though less overwhelmingly crowded, and BIG TOP ON JUPITER I would call bad. Your shorts are, surprisingly, excellent!

CONTINUED STORY I like a great deal. The plot is good. The writing is good. AND RETURN suffers rather from over-sleazy development. THE WHATSITS was both neat and entertaining.

YOUR ARTICLE ON THE PERILS OF EMPTY SPACE is largely nonsense. Have you ever computed the odds against you hitting a meteor—a big meteor, maybe weighing four grains? Someone else has got the meteor complex. Any average-sized spaceship says Arthur, would have to wait several million years before it met a meteor an inch across. Further: unless you and the meteor were in a collision orbit, you'd be traveling at the same speed as each other, roughly speaking (unless you happen to have on hand a drive with

which you can run under four g's clear from here to there,) since you would only have the velocity required to drift from the point where you left the orbit of the earth to that of the planet you're headed for. AND DON'T FOR THE LOVE OF CLARKE TALK ABOUT DETECTING METEORS IN SPACE! Think! If it was traveling fast enough to do damage, it would be traveling too fast to avoid it. Get? Or maybe your article-writing pal thinks you can turn a spaceship in its own length on short notice?

Thanks, Arthur. You may now resume your former position.

Your art is quite pleasant. Is that Lawrence or Orban on the lead tale? Suggestion: assign Poulton a lead some time. His work on CONTINUED STORY wasn't so hot but he sure can draw sometimes. The best pic was that for THE WHATSITS. Even so, it was not up to the usual standard for your zines.

However, push on! I'm all for the non-cerebral type of sf story because it makes for an occasional mindless hour. I shall buy SPS as religiously as I do the TWINS. BUT I BET THE FOLK I BUY IT OFF KEEP CONFUSING IT WITH A COUPLE OF OTHERS OF THE SAME NAME! And I intend this very night to start (or tomorrow) on a novel for you, which I can always sell to someone else later.—Highlands, Woodrode, Reading, U.K.

Agreed Walton's story had everything in it but the kitchen sink (and I'm not too sure there wasn't a sink somewhere around at that), didn't you say you enjoy a non-cerebral story now and then? So my notion of a non-cerebral story is that you stop worrying about plausibility and consistency to the same degree as on other types of stories and you just sink hack and let yourself go with all the big colorful rush of action. You can't have it both ways—at least not very often. John, it's amazing how much I can disagree with you and still appreciate your criticism. Can't wait to see that novel you're going to do. Might even surprise you and buy it if it's non-cerebral enuf.

If you're interested in hack numbers, any of you, Dorla Scott of 12454 Linden Road, Clio, Michigan has some she wants to sell, will send you a list for a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Can't subscribe to TWS, SS, FSM and SPS unless she sells the books and raises some dough.

That's it for this voyage. See you all back here in this same spot two months from now.

—The Editor

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SCIENCE-FICTION BOOKSHELF

REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

SPACE CAT by Rathven Todd, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 72 pages, \$2.00.

A MODERN Pass-In-Boots goes sailing out into space in a delightful extravaganza for children. We pre-tested this book on our nine year old daughter, who devoured it in



one sitting and needed nothing explained to her, from which we deduced it was just about suited to her age. It makes a wonderful gift for young children just beginning to talk about rockets and space travel—as all the kids from six up are now doing—if you don't mind two bucks for a slim little volume. The text is charming and the pictures by Paul Galdone have the rollicking quality exactly suited to the subject.

Flyball, the adventurous gray kitten, runs away from home, becomes a mascot at a flying field and gets involved with the first rocket experiments in passenger flight. Captain Fred, Flyball's master, makes a space suit for the cat and takes him along on the first successful flight to the moon. The cat's poise is something any human might envy. A nice little book—if it sold for seventy-five cents it would be quite a deal, but I wonder how many they'll sell at two dollars?

THE second five volumes of the Winston teen-age science fiction library have arrived. The same handsome jackets by well known artists and end papers by Alex Schomburg distinguish these volumes. In-

cidentally, we have seen the first set around in book stores, hobby and top stores—the colorful jackets make a nice display.

SONS OF THE OCEAN DEEPS by Bryce Walton, the John C. Winston Co., Philadelphia, 216 pages, \$2.00. Jacket by Paul Orban, and paper illustrations by Alex Schomburg.

BRYCE Walton's colorful prose is familiar to readers of **SPACE STORIES** and other science fiction magazines and his fertile imagination makes him almost perfectly fitted for the kind of rapid adventure story designed to hold a teen-ager's interest. This is not the usual space opera, it is more reminiscent of Jules Verne's "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea," which was also good science fiction.

With most of our globe covered by oceans, many writers have flirted with the idea of life on the vast sea bottoms and this is a tale of adventure miles under the green waters. Battles between men and sea monsters in fabulous underground cities, a vast Project X designed to save a doomed continent all add up to swift and exciting action in Walton's best style.

ROCKET JOCKEY by Philip St. John, the John C. Winston Co., Philadelphia, 207 pages, \$2.00, jacket and end paper illustration by Alex Schomburg.

TRUE space opera, this is the tale of a seventeen year old racing jockey competing in the wildest race of all time—the Armstrong Classic.

By the year 2170, racing had moved from the stratosphere to the black reaches of space and the racing rockets covered a course which took them to every planet inhabited by man in an immense orbit. Mars had won the past three races by techniques considered slightly unethical on Earth. Jerry Blaine, who had never considered himself eligible for the post found himself catapulted into the position of Earth's contender by sheer accident and then stayed in it to test the dangerous rocket fuel that had killed his father. Wild and wooly.

MISTS OF DAWN by Chad Oliver, the John C. Winston Co., Philadelphia, 208 pages, \$2.00, jacket and end paper illustrations by Alex Schomburg.

CHAD OLIVER is another name of growing familiarity to readers of the Thrilling group's science fiction magazines—the fan who matured into a writer of steadily increasing

[Turn page]

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BROTHERHOOD WEEK



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A Brotherhood Week Message

By LAWRENCE LARIAR

Famous Mystery Writer and Cartoonist

I HAVE been asked to speak of brotherhood. This is a difficult assignment, for many words have already been written on the theme, and many sermons preached by minds more erudite than mine: Yet, there is a profit sometimes in the simple thought of a simple man.

For me, brotherhood is only love.

Often I have sat in great audiences, among good men who listened to good preachments from pulpit and podium. These men were my brothers, all of them, and while they gave their ears to the gentle words concerning brotherhood, a kind of calm seemed settled over them. The great hall sang with the spirit of peace and kindness. The minds of my listening brothers opened to friendship.

But afterwards, what then?

When my brothers wandered away from the temple, a strange thing happened. Brotherhood, they told me, was limited to certain special types. Brotherhood, they showed me, was involved and intricate, beset by categories and classifications, breeds and races, religions, sects, divisions and subdivisions. There was a black brotherhood and a white brotherhood. There was a Christian brotherhood and a Jewish brotherhood.

And they fought with vicious stubbornness to preserve these fostered concepts of their hate and fear and ignorance. And they forgot the softer sentiments of the preachers and the teachers, abandoning the good words in the battleground of reality, the every day arena in the struggle against prejudice.

Yet, there are many who fight the good fight, who realize that brotherhood is not just a Bible word, a cliché to be mouthed only in the churches and the tabernacles.

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